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AUTHOR OF 'JOSIAH'S WIFE'

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CHAPTER I

'FOR the Lord will not fail his people; neither will he forsake his inheritance.'

It was at even, ere the sun was set, that these words fell upon the idle ears of Grace Christian.

Neither the bared heads of the fishermen, nor the attentive attitude of the women listening, with the conscious calm of not far distant village homes lending an air of domestic peace to the scene, served to touch a nerve of poetic emotion in the girl's flippant nature.

Not yet out of the hearing of the little gathering of people, she turned to the Squire, her brother, with a shallow laugh.

'What a particularly unsuitable text! Methodists have no sense of humour; and yet it was not forbidden by Wesley.'

The Squire reluctantly took his eyes off the figure of the young preacher and turned them reproachfully on his sister. It was a brilliant face, beautiful enough to arouse even a brother's admiration. As he looked at her he did not speak, no words were

ready; but his expression clearly showed that, man-like, without taking any active part in living up to the precepts of Christ's doctrine (professing through circumstances a Christian belief, without letting the restraint and sacrifices of its teaching interfere with his worldly pleasures), he disliked hearing flippant utterances from the lips of a pretty woman, more especially his own sister.

Clearly noting his look, and resenting it, Grace went on—'Surely if there ever was a time when the Lord had failed his people it has been during the past year. The village has been positively devastated with scarlet fever, there is scarcely a house in the village that has not suffered; and now they say that the herrings have left the coast . . . and yet—'

She paused a moment, and the preacher's voice was heard again:

'In the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, thy comforts have refreshed my soul.'

The girl had to strain her ears to catch the last words, although the preacher's voice was clear and penetrating, for the sky overhead was black with rooks homing to the small plantation of fir trees under which the little meeting had gathered, and the chorus of cawing, to denote their day's work done, broke the stillness of the air, and drowned the preacher's voice. Grace Christian walked on in silence for a few moments, as they turned out of the

meadow into the narrow path through a wild gean orchard which wound its way towards the wide avenue leading to the Big House.

'Who is she?' the Squire at last asked half-absently, as if expecting to place her in his memory, before his sister answered. 'Do I know her?'

'Of course you do; she's a Colby girl, born and bred. She's only "old Ned Gawne's girl"; Mirry-Ann as the people call her. I believe she styles herself Marion.'

'Great Scissors! Not little Mirry Gawne, old Ned Gawne's girl?'

'Yes; the very same. Some well-meaning fool, I hear, educated her in a Methodist college in Liverpool. When she came back to the village she took up this preaching craze.'

The Squire laughed, a little tenderly.

'Of course, I recognise her now. But, Grace, she was always religious, even as a little bit of a thing. She used to ask me all sorts of questions about my soul, don't you remember? But she was a dear little child. Just fancy little Mirry Gawne, with the tearful blue eyes, grown up into a Methodist preacher, and—' he paused.

'And?' Grace asked.

'And,' the Squire laughed back, 'a really beautiful woman.'

'Her religion's all humbug. I don't believe a bit in it. She comes of a bad lot. She merely thinks

it suits her style. I feel sure she is perfectly well aware how much more striking she looks, dressed like a Quaker, than decked out in curled crows' feathers and cotton roses, like the other village girls. I can't stand her at any price.'

'Apparently not, dear'; and the Squire looked slyly at his sister. 'But, surely, you needn't be jealous of a girl in that position? I know that two pretty women of the same colour never can admire each other.'

'Same colour, indeed!' and the girl's slim back straightened, as, with chin uplifted, she sailed down the narrow orchard path like a white yacht carrying her full complement of sail. 'Same colour!' she repeated scornfully; 'thanks, chum, I'm sorry for your eyesight.'

'Oh, my eyesight's right enough, and I know quite well that if that lovely girl's skin wasn't exposed so much to the sun and sea, and if a maid brushed that great coil of hair and tucked it up in that funny sort of pump-handle business, like yours, which shows off all the lights in it, the *tout ensemble* would be pretty much the same colour as Miss Grace Christian of Ballaugh.'

'What about our eyes, pray? A woman's colouring goes by her eyes, a man's by his moustache;' and Grace turned her indignant grey ones full on her brother's face. 'Mirry Gawne's are the regular fisher-girl's blue; mine are the true Wheatley eyes.'

'Gay, grey, and godless; eh, Grace?'

'It doesn't pay, chum dear, to show your feelings if you're a woman; blue eyes are such spooney things, they always give a girl away.'

The Squire's eyes were frankly blue, and delightfully merry.

'No one could accuse Grace Christian of being spooney,' he said. 'A little more feeling wouldn't spoil your beauty, dear. Men like to know that a girl is a *woman* and not only a female. In fact——'

'In fact,' Grace interrupted, 'when a man's looking at a girl, he likes picturing to himself how she'd behave when he first tried to kiss her. It's always what's to follow in a pretty woman that interests a man.'

'You seem to be wise in the ways of men. How would you take it?'

Grace was stooping to catch up the blue Persian cat, which had come down the portico of the white stone house to meet her.

'Don't be absurd, Frank. There's nobody in Colby who wants to try, in the first place. Besides, the men one wouldn't mind kissing, one would mind marrying, and the one is so often taken as a preliminary to the other.'

They had reached the 'Big House,' as Ballaugh was familiarly called. In the square hall plenty of easy-chairs, books, and light literature of to-day were scattered about in a becoming untidiness. There was

a look of modern luxury about the place which was characteristic of its owners.

Grace threw herself down in a low rocking-chair. The blue-haired cat curled itself up in a coaxing attitude between her neck and shoulders. She picked up the letters which had just arrived by the evening mail; two were for her brother and one was for herself. She opened her own idly while she tickled the soft breast of the cat.

'Here are two for you, Frank,' she said. 'One looks like Uncle Robert's writing. I do hope he isn't offering to visit us. I'm so sick of Uncle Robert.'

Frank took the letters from his sister and put them both unopened into his pocket. 'Uncle Robert's letters will always keep, and they generally answer themselves if you leave them long enough. What an old beast he is; he'd borrow a shilling without a blush, but he knows I'm good for a fiver rather than have him here. I think I'll have another stroll, Grace,' he said, suddenly changing the subject. 'It's really too lovely to come in yet. I suppose supper's at nine as usual?'

Grace pretended to yawn; she was really watching her brother very closely.

'Oh yes, it makes the evenings so horribly long if we dine any earlier, but don't be late.'

'There's plenty of time for a stroll. I'll be back in good time,' and the young Squire kissed the cat

that was purring happily near the shining hair. He was an affectionate fellow, and would gladly have kissed his sister, but that was a liberty no one ever took with Grace Christian. She knew, however, that the caress given to the cat was meant to convey that her brother was sorry if he had said anything to annoy her, and this was quite as near as any ever came to showing their feelings to the young mistress of Ballaugh.

When the Squire had left the house, Grace stopped reading her letter, and addressed the cat with a mischievous smile on her face.

'Kitty dear,' she said, 'he's gone to have another look at the pretty preacher; you and I know the habits of the male sex, don't we, dear. I didn't live under Uncle Robert's roof for nothing. We know how demureness attracts them *almost* as much as badness, and how beautiful he'll think her when she sings the evening hymn. Mirry Gawne is a clever woman, Kitty, although she is only the base-born child of a fisher girl.'

Grace paused, and thought for a moment. 'But it's her eyes, pussy, and the woman in them that does it. Mine are only female's eyes, I suppose, hers are a woman's, tender and appealing. And Frank is so susceptible, pussy, it's very dangerous, but what's to be done?'

She took up her letter again, and was soon lost in it, while her susceptible brother found his way back,

apparently unconsciously, to the little cluster of people gathered together under the fir-trees.

When he reached the spot, the evening hymn was being sung. Mirry Gawne's clear voice rose well above the less certain singing of the congregation. Frank Christian stood a little apart and watched with beating pulses the girl whom he remembered as a golden-haired child; a gentle little child with serious blue eyes, and 'mortal genteel ways at her' as the villagers expressed it.

It was well before the days of the Salvation Army movement, or at least before that 'great army of peace' had invaded all the quiet corners of the world. But Mirry-Ann Gawne's black bonnet was not unlike the bonnet of the modern Salvation Army lass. Her heavy coil of light hair just fitted into the opening in the bonnet behind, and lay softly on the slender neck; white strings were tied closely under her chin.

Frank noticed all this with a man's quick instinct for the good points in a woman, and also that her plain black frock fitted her flowing figure, which had none of the flatness or angularity so noticeable amongst the lower classes when once they adorn themselves in their chapel clothes. The girl was so uncommonly beautiful that the young man half hoped she would not notice his presence.

The rooks had almost cawed their last, and were gradually quieting for the night, not however without

some family discussions over the favourite corners, and the red glow of the departing sun was low over the sea. The words of the hymn had never struck the Squire's careless youth as particularly worth listening to until he heard them from the lips of Mary Ann Gawne :—

'Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes ;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies ;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee.
In life and death, O Lord, abide with me !'

The girl read aloud each verse before it was sung. All present knew the words by heart, but it was an old island custom when books were scarce amongst the people, and not an unpleasant one. She read well, and raised the singing with no trace of shyness in her voice.

Frank Christian remained spell-bound. Her eyes were lit up with a beautiful spiritual emotion, but they were still the pure, blue eyes of the little child he had played with so long ago. Her identity came back to him in flashes; he remembered how easily he had made her cry, and how when she cried as a little child her long dark lashes would stick together in heavy wet patches with her tears. Then again he remembered her love for animals, and her childish pity for all things suffering and wounded. But all this was before he went to school in England, in the days when he knew the name of every boy and girl in the village, and played with them as their equal

until, perhaps, some point in the game caused a noisy dispute; then Frank Christian would turn on his heel, and mind him that he was the Squire's son. He knew well enough that he had only to assert his position by passing through the tall iron gates where the village youngsters used to stand and peep at the Big House half hidden in the trees, with its brilliant patches of red geranium and yellow calceolaria showing, the whole length of the avenue away.

He had scarcely been in the old place since his childish days, as his father had died when he was little more than ten years old, and during his minority he had lived with his aunt, Miss Wheatley, a half-sister of his mother's.

When the evening hymn was finished, Mirry Gawne's eyes met those of the young Squire, and a blush of surprise lit up her face, and, Frank Christian thought, almost a look of gladness as well. But the next moment her eyes were bent on the ground, and a blessing was asked. Then the meeting broke up, and the villagers took their way through the meadow towards the village.

The Squire went up to the mound where Mirry-Ann still stood; he raised his hat, and the girl bowed politely, saying, half with dignity, half with respectful shyness—'Good-evening, sir, we're glad to see you back again.'

The Squire had a singularly engaging personality

which had made him highly popular both at school and at Oxford. It was principally due to the boyish expression of his well-bred face and the frankness of his blue eyes. Young girls would have called him 'awfully good-looking,' women would have described him as 'lovable.'

He answered her quickly.

'And I'm awfully glad to be back among you all again. I feel just as young as ever; in fact, I thought I was a boy still, but I find that all the boys and girls I left have grown into men and women. It was my sister who told me that you are little Mirry Gawne.'

He looked at her slim maidenly height with an amused smile.

'Would you not have known me, sir?'

The Squire laughed. 'If I had seen your eyes, yes, I think I should, but I only heard your voice. Would you have known me? Yes, I think men change more than girls.'

'We don't grow moustaches, sir,' and the girl laughed, a delicious laugh that had nothing to do with her serious eyes and manner. 'Perhaps, sir, if I hadn't known you were home I might not, but, you see, we've all been looking for you; it's so dull in the village when the Big House is shut up. I hope, sir, you mean to live here. It's bad for the village when the Squire is away. There's no one to take any real interest in the people.'

'Or for the people to take a real interest in. The affairs of the "Big House" keep them busy?'

'That's very true, sir. Colby is a terrible place for gossip, but they don't mean any harm by it; they have so little in their lives, they must peep into those that are larger. But I must be going, sir; good-evening.'

'Please stop a minute, Miss Gawne . . . or Mirry-Ann, which is it to be? May I call you Mirry-Ann?'

'I should think so indeed; it would sound very strange if you didn't, sir.'

'But you've grown up since I left, and you've been to college, a regular blue-stocking. I hear you took the Manx scholarship, or something, didn't you?'

'Yes, sir. Uncle is a good Manx scholar, and it came easy to me, and the scholarship took me to school in Liverpool, but I'm only Mirry Gawne, old Ned Gawne's *girl*, for all that, sir.' The blue eyes were veiled behind their lashes as she said the words a little bitterly.

The Squire remembered the expression in the old days. 'Old Ned Gawne's girl,' he had used the very words to his sister that day. It was the name the girl went by in the village, for Ned Gawne was her only relative, and he was only her grand-uncle.

'You are my own little play-fellow, Mirry Gawne,' and the Squire held out his handto the girl, and for the gracious words her heart went out to him.

When she put her hand into his, ungloved and brown, he felt that her slender fingers were not the inheritance of humble fisher blood, nor was the quiet dignity of her manner.

When she turned and left him a little abruptly, the Squire stayed to watch her black-gowned figure pass down the meadow. Buttercups all gold were growing in their slender grace, and dog daisies almost reached up to the girl's knees as she walked. Mirry-Ann Gawne loved buttercups and all field flowers, and she stopped now and then to gather some on her way home. Some artist would have loved to paint the black figure in the evening light passing through the waving sea of flowers.

Frank Christian was no artist, but a very human young man.

'I hope I shan't fall in love with her,' he said, which meant that he had done so already. 'She's so confoundedly pretty. Grace isn't fair, for she's the simplest creature I ever met. Circumstances may have placed her in a cottage, but I am sure Nature made her for a lady. But no, she's better suited to a natural simple life, reigning queen of it all. My lady of the flowers, I'll call her. . . . She'd turn the head of half the stalls if she went on the stage dressed like that, and sang a song, or a hymn, for the matter of that. Johnnies might be induced to listen to hymns if they could hear them sung from lips like those. She's simply stunning. I

wonder who on earth her father was? But I can't even recollect her mother; I must ask Grace.'

But Grace Christian had no recollection of Mirry Gawne's mother.

History had repeated itself with Mirry-Ann's family. Both her grandmother and her mother were village belles, but neither of them had found husbands in village beaus. Maidenly virtue was but lightly thought of in these outwardly respectable and peaceful little villages. Young mothers' heads were not bowed with shame when their babes were registered in their maiden names, nor were their chances of winning a good husband lessened by their trouble. A few shillings a week served to father the child well enough; there was always a place for it in the old home if the young mothers and fathers were regular in their contributions towards its expenses.

When Mirry Gawn's mother was a baby the weekly sum which fathered the little one did not come from the Manx herring-fleet at Kinsale. It was strange that the village curiosity never did fathom where that money came from, one of the chief reasons being that it never passed through the village post-office.

Some said that it came from no less a person than the Attorney-General himself, for Mirry Gawne's grandmother was a winsome, delicate thing

when she went to be maid in his mother's house. Her child, Emma Gawne, was in her turn the village beauty. She never went to service; her uncle, Ned Gawne, had tried to be wise and profit by the example of her mother's unhappy story, and he hoped that by keeping the girl in her village home under his own eye he would save her from the danger that her beauty would subject her to.

Old Ned Gawne, and his wife who died when Emma was a mere child, were the only near relatives that pretty Emma Gawne had in the village.

Her beauty was delicate and provoking, and, although she was a nameless child, there was scarcely a man in the village, from the schoolmaster who had a bit of 'college learning at him' (which in after days he bestowed gratuitously on Emma Gawne's daughter), to the Wesleyan preacher, who would not gladly have given her his own. 'She had real genteel ways at her and a mortal saf' tongue in her head' that made the young girls in the village dislike her, but at a prayer-meeting, or a choir-practice, it was little Emma Gawne who had the pick of the village lads to see her home. In all grades men are only grateful for favours to come, and if Emma Gawne was sparing of her favours, and ever postponed the liberty of walking hand-in-hand through the dark lanes; or made the lads fear to snatch a kiss—more hurried than tender, as they did with other lasses—it was in their minds only the more tempting for the

postponement. The delightful anticipation of what was still to be, it was that kept them ever at her beck and call. Each walk might see the barrier broken down, each message or mission well performed, might be repaid by a kiss.

Her eyes—the eyes which she bequeathed to her daughter, Mirry-Ann—were like the sea, and every man could read with quickening heart the depth of stormy passion that would one day be stirred up in their peaceful blue.

The day came when Emma Gawne suddenly left the village, and the girls were glad, for there was peace in the minds of the men and they turned their thoughts to those who were not too fine to walk hand-in-hand with the lads that wore the guernseys.

Emma Gawne never returned to heal the aching in her uncle's heart or to disturb the village courtships. But a little blue-eyed child came instead, and all the village knew that they were the eyes of Emma's child.

Thus it was that Mirry Gawne had two generations of gentle blood in her veins inherited on both sides from the father. And her father's blood was strong although it was unrecognised, for the graces of heredity come to the nameless as well as to the great. If her mother had had a lawful right to her father's name the law of inheritance could not have done its work more surely.

In the village, Mirry-Ann was nothing more nor

less than a child of accident—little Emma Gawne's trouble. The folk did not think less of her on that account; still, the fact robbed her of a home, for her great-uncle, Ned Gawne, was getting too old to make much by the fishing, and Mirry-Ann could not leave him in his old age to make a living for herself.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Mirry-Ann reached her uncle's cottage the same evening she found the old man brooding over the fire. His big Bible was open on his knees, but his eyes were closed and his head was sunk on his chest.

'Are you cold, dad?' she said gently, 'on such a fine night as this? If you had taken the meeting, it would have done you more good than this poor fire.'

She put her two hands on the old man's shoulder and stooped down to kiss his weather-beaten face. The meadow air was still clinging to her clothes, and a new sweet fragrance of youth and summer seemed to emanate from her through the room.

It was a little while before the old man spoke. The girl's cheek was soft and cool.

'It's mortal couth I am, Mirry-Ann, but praychin' 'ill not bring no warmth to my ould bones at all.'

'O dad, but it brings such warmth to the soul—it kindles the spirit.'

'My Gough, but it's thrue what you're sayin', Mirry-Ann, the spirit is willin' but the flesh is wake.

It wass tryin' to follow you up to the prayer matin' I wass when the rheumatics took me that bad that Tom Quilliam's woman had to give me a han' home.'

'Why didn't you come with me, dad? I had to walk all the way there, and back, alone.'

Mirry-Ann had slipped down on her knees in front of the old man, for she was fast rubbing some of the vitality of her young blood into his old trembling limbs. Her voice shook a little as she asked the question, and the old man's head sank further down on his breast.

'It's true, dad, I wanted you, I wanted the spiritual help of your presence. Now that the immediate fear of death has passed from the village the hearts of the people have fallen back into the old cold way. Ah, how they prayed and implored the Master's pity, whilst He shook their hearts with fear! Why didn't you come, dad?'

'Mirry-Ann,' the old man said at last, and the words came slowly, 'thou art doin' what seems right in thine own eyes. Thou'rt doin' what may seem right in the eyes of the Lord, but thou'rt not doin' what I like to see a young wom-an do. Thou'rt doin' man's work. Praychin', lass, in the chapel, or in the fields, is man's work. A wom-an's work is in the house mindin' the childer.'

'But you *were* coming to hear me yourself, dad, you've just said so,' and the girl smiled, with a look

of such tenderness in her eyes that it was a pity that only the old rumpy cat was privileged to see it.

'Thrue enough, chile villish, thrue enough, but I 'm not sayin' that I wass aisy in me conscience for all, though. But they 're tellin' me that thy schoolin' and thy fine larnin' has given thee a mortal fine tongue in thy head, and a powerful clare way of puttin' things. 'Deed but they 're sayin' as how thou 'rt movin' men's hearts just as aisy as the Lord Bishop himself. An' I wass wantin' to hear thee, lass, for it 's the las' time, Mirry-Ann; thou 'st promised, and thou 'lt kape thy word?'

'Yes, dad, it 's the last time. I 'll not preach again.'

'An' I 'm mortal glad to hear thee promise, for it 's not wom-an's work; the 'fection 's all over, lass, let them go back to the chapel again.'

These pious Methodists who spent most of their spare time in their chapels, or at prayer-meetings, raising up prophets among themselves with as little difficulty as a Hindoo juggler raises up a palm-tree on the deck of a ship out of a tumblerful of dry sand, had at heart a mighty reverence for the Established Church. It was in even keeping with their grudging respect for the upper classes. They were an ultra-independent race, scorning charity given in the form of charity, while at the same time, stronger than their independent radical views, was their inherited respect for 'real gentry.' The church belonged to the gentry,

and the chapel to the people. But there was not the same enjoyment to be derived from going to the conventional service in the little whitewashed church in the morning as there was in suddenly being called upon by the brethren at the chapel in the evening to address the meeting.

There was no hard and fast line drawn between the church and chapel, almost every man, woman, and child were regular church-goers. The long white road which led from the village to the parish church was raised to a cloud of dust every Sunday morning with the trooping of heavy country feet. The precious black of the elder women and the gay colours of the younger folk, mixed with the stiff blue coats of the men, made an unending stream from village to church.

The seats in the church were all free, but so regular were these devout chapel people in their morning attendance at church that every sitting had by right of custom been allotted to its particular owner. But their attitude in the service, which, it must be confessed, was not soul-stirring, was one of passive indifference. It is true that they sang the popular hymns with more than necessary unction, swaying from side to side, true sailor fashion, and often keeping time with their heavy boots on the wooden floor. The zeal of an old man, the captain of the parish, had necessitated a new zinc floor for his pew, for rumour had it that the old hymn 'There

is a fountain filled with blood,' had worn out three floors, in the captain's pew, in his lifetime.

But all this was due to their intense love of singing, and is a digression from the story.

When Mirry-Ann had rubbed some life into the old man's rheumatic limbs, she busied herself preparing the evening meal.

'Herrings and potatoes, dad,' she said, 'and if what they say is true it will soon be potatoes without the herrings.'

'Herrin' and spuds, you mane,' and the blue eyes of the old man, under their heavy eyebrows, looked at the girl with such a mingling of scorn and anger that the hot blood mounted to her white forehead. 'What art thou doin' with that new-fangled way of talkin' at ye? Spuds and herrin'. Can't thou kape a dacent tongue in thy head, and not be apin' the foreign gibberish thou 'rt hearin' in Liverpool?'

''Deed an' I warn't apin', dad, and that's the thruth I 'm tellin' thee. I didn't ape at all, I joost clane forgot.' And the girl's arms went round him while the homely words slipped off her tongue with so perfect an imitation of the old man's brogue that he fell to laughing.

'There, Mirry-Ann, lave go and don't be endangerin' thy foolish sowl with tellin' lies; it 's just apin' the gentry thou art, to practise thy larnin', but thou 'rt only ould Ned Gawne's girl for all, thou 'st naught to do with genteel folks.'

The potatoes and herrings were set on the little table, which was covered with a spotless white cloth made of coarse homespun yarn. And the bright flowering yellow calceolarias and red geraniums formed a screen against the window to keep off the curious eyes of the passers-by, for the little white cottage was built on the village street. Two chairs were drawn up to the table, and the old man told the girl to ask a blessing.

For a moment she did not speak. When she had command of her voice, the old man looked at her covertly under his bushy eyebrows ; large tears had dropped between her fingers on to the white cloth. Mirry-Ann was ever easily made to weep, as the young Squire had remembered.

At the sight of her tears the old man took out a rough red handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to the girl.

'Wipe thy eyes, lass, thou'rt tired with thy praychin'. It's no wom-an's work, I tould thee.' And he took her hands in his, which were the honest horny hands of toil.

'I'm not tired, dad, but thou'rt ever throwin' in my face that I'm only ould Ned Gawne's girl.'

'And ain't ould Ned Gawne good enough for thee, lass?' and the old man tried to laugh, but the laugh was tearful and the voice was bitter.

'Yes, too good, dad dear, if it was ould Ned Gawne's daughter I was called, but it's just ould

Ned's girl, and it's dreadfully hard, dad, to have that always dragging you down when it ain't any fault of your own.'

'My Gough, and who said it wass draggin' thee down? I'll be draggin' them down that's sayin' it. There's not a house in the street that can throw a stone at ye, for there's more love-childer nor Emma Gawne's in the village.—Mirry-Ann,' the old man went on more softly, 'if I wass sayin' it meself, a few minutes ago, it wass joost 'cause thou wart talkin' that new-fangled talk, that don't belong at all to the paple as found thee bread and mate when thou wert lef', a little bundle of yeller hair and blue eyes, in ould Ned's boat out yonder, fas' asleep under the sate. There warn't no name put on ye at all, and ye couldn't spake, but yer eyes were the same, chil', the very same, ye wass the mortal spit of her all over. And when ye grew up I could see the same saf' genteel ways comin' with yer play, and yer very han's too, Mirry-Ann, were joost the same, always saf' and nate-like, no matter if thou wart palin' the spuds or helpin' thy ould dad to gut the herrin'. If I could have shook the genteel ways out of ye I would, lass; once, it's thrue as I'm sittin' here, I tried to do it. But it's makin' me laugh joost to think of it. Thou wart a li'l bit of a thing, but thou wart showin' too plain for my likin' that it warn't workin' blood that ran strongest in thy veins. My Gough, chile, but I wass up wi' ye, and nearly bate

the life out of thy li'l body. An' would ye believe it, when I put ye down all covered with tears—thou wart a rare one to cry, Mirry-Ann—yes, all tears and herrin' scales, for I wass joost saltin' for the winter, thou wart up and walked away with as much pride and consate in thy li'l body as the Governor's wife herself. An' the imperence of ye, before I had time to get me breath ye had put up a prayer for yer ould uncle, an' a mighty fine prayer it wass, too, for the chile ye wass then. Mirry-Ann, it's cause I love ye like me own flesh an' blood, that's been lyin' all them fifty years in the churchyard, that I can't listen to that genteel tongue in thy head. Them as threw thee back on thy mawther's paple for every bite ye ever ate, ain't good enough, if they do be gentry, for ould Ned Gawne's girl to be apin'.'

'Who knows that they were not fisher people just like ourselves, dad? Why are you so certain that poor mother loved a gentleman?'

'He warn't no gentleman, Mirry-Ann, leastways not what the Lord and I reckon a gentleman. But Emma Gawne, she never had no fancy for the Colby lads, she wass mortal independent. Not carin' if she warn't seen keepin' company with a young fellow from one year's end to the tother. She wass joost as happy and contented like sittin' out yonder with me mendin' the nets, or sidin' up the house, as she wass goin' to a prayer matin' or a burial with the smartest young fellow in the place.

Thy mawther, Mirry-Ann, wass a rare one to taze; sometimes I wass thinkin' it wass just to draw the lads on that she wass houldin' back; for she would be takin' her guernsey out there in the sun, and sit, lookin' as demure as the ould cat there when she's pretendin' she don't notice the li'l mouse, joost at the very nick of time that the gels and young fellows would be walkin' out. Some of the gels would be lookin' at her as if they would like to turn her into a ghoul, while the young fellows would be havin' big sighs at her as would sail a nickie out of port yonder and a flood tide runnin' agin her.'

'And did you never even guess, dad?'

'Guess what, lass?'

'Guess rightly who stole her poor heart from the Colby lads?'

The old man got up and struck his hand on the table and glared at the girl. The memory of sweet Emma Gawne had roused all his old deadly hatred against the upper classes.

'No, chile, I didn't, naver. The Lord saw to that, for it's murther as would have been done if I'd caught sight of his dirty face. But thy mawther kept her secret too close for that. With all her merry ways and the light heart arrar, Emma Gawne wass hidin' a heavy sacret. But she couldn' hide it from the Lord, Mirry-Ann, though she warn' takin' no thought of her soul, like you, lass, for she wass joost takin' religion as lightly as she wass takin'

her young man, joost somethin' to come in handy like when there warn' nothin' else in sason. Even at a prayer matin' she'd be smilin' and as jolly lookin' as if the Lord had chosen Emma Gawne out particular like, joost as if there warn' no judgment day sure and sartin for Emma Gawne. And there warn' no way of convartin' her neither, she wass that slippery about her sowl, just tazin' the Lord as she wass tazin' every other man.'

'Poor, poor little mother, what a child she was! just think, dad, only seventeen when it all happened! She was such a foolish child, perhaps the Lord would . . .' Mirry-Ann hesitated.

'Make it aisy for her, is it that you wass manin', Mirry-Ann? make it aisy for her when the smile wass took off her pretty face and she found that there wass a hell and judgment day for li'l Emma Gawne? Mirry-Ann, I've been puttin' up a prayer every night and mornin' since you wass lef' in the boat out yonder that thy poor mother wass ready to be took.'

'She was far more sinned against than sinning; she was so simple and trusting, dad, and she had never known a mother's care.'

'Mirry-Ann, it warn' that she trusted the man she loved too well, that wass brakin' me heart at all. It were joost that she didn't trust her ould dad, that brought her up, enough. Gough, but she wass decaivin' me all the time, she wass playin' with me

like. Chile villish, but it 's kapin' me from lovin' and trustin' you, 'deed but it is though.'

Mirry-Ann knew quite well that like most of the other old villagers her uncle thought but lightly of such misfortunes in love if the father of the child recognised his claim to share in its support, and did not bring life-long ruin on the mother. It was the girl's deception which seemed the real sin in the old man's eyes. The other was a natural weakness of a young and loving nature.

He roused himself as if to shake off the bitter memory, and called out sharply to Mirry-Ann, who had gone out to get a breath of fresh air on the cottage doorstep. The discussion had roused a storm of feeling in her heart.

'Are they comin' in sight yet, lass?—they should be roundin' the Point.'

Mirry-Ann had been gazing seawards, but with eyes all unmindful of what they saw. Hearing the old man's voice she looked again towards Poolvash Point. 'Yes, they 're comin', dad. John Thomas is leading the way—look, dad, look how she 's making for the port!'

Very slowly old Ned Gawne rose from his chair, and Mirry-Ann stepped back into the cottage and helped him to the door.

''Deed, but she's comin' in mighty quick, though! John Thomas has got a mortal smart boat at him, but I 'm thinkin' he 's that eager to see *some one*

that he's pickin' up every ounce of wind round the Point.'

'Ah! here they all come, Ned Kenvig, look, dad, and John William Kenean, and every one of them.' Mirry-Ann pretended not to notice the old man's pointed allusion to John Thomas's eagerness to get home. The fishing-boats, nickies as they were called, were all duly christened and registered at their home port, most of them were called after their owner's sweetheart or wife. The *Mary Jane*, *Betsy Anne*, *Victoria Maud*, were popular names in the fleet. John Thomas Costain's white nickie was christened the *Mary Ann*, a common enough name in the village, but significant of only one woman in John Thomas's eyes.

It was a comfort to him perhaps when he was out at sea to have something of his very own called 'Mary Ann,' something which he could touch and handle and speak tenderly to. But when the fleet rounded Poolvash Point, and made for Port St. Mary, then the very women whose names the boats bore and who knew each one by sight, spoke of them by their husband's names and called to each other concerning the *John Thomas, Ned Clucas* or *John William Kenean.*

'Good luck to them, Mirry-Ann, but it's mortal couth, and my ould bones is full of the rheumatics. Who'll be takin' the cart in the mornin'?'

The girl helped him back to his chair by the fire-

side. 'I 'll see to that, dad; you can't go. Come, I 'll give you a sup of hot ale and put you to bed.'

Her uncle looked at her curiously. 'Thou 'lt be askin' John Thomas to take the cart, Mirry-Ann? he 'll be glad enough to do it for thee, lass.'

There was no reply to his question, and the old man spoke roughly:

'Thou 'st got no tongue in thy head to answer?'

'No, dad; John Thomas Costain *won't* take the cart; he 'll have more than enough to do to-morrow without doing other folks' work.'

'Mirry-Ann, thou 'lt let the herrin' go to dung in the harbour before thou 'lt take a favor from John Thomas. Let thy dad have a bit of peace.'

'We can't always be taking favours, dad, and not giving anything in return. It was John Thomas who dug the garden in the spring.' A wave of distress came over the girl. 'Oh, I can't let him do it, leave the cart to me.'

The old man whimpered softly: ''Deed, Mirry-Ann Gawne, but thou 'rt thy mawther's own daughter for all the religion that 's at ye. Why can't ye be givin' John Thomas the favor he 's askin'?'

'Some people ask too high a favour for driving a herring-cart, dad.'

'Then thou 'lt let the herrin' go rot?'

'No, dad, don't be afraid, the herrings will go to market. Here 's thy warm ale. I 'll take the cart myself.'

The old man jumped up.

'' 'Deed, Mirry-Ann, but thou shan't, though; ould Ned Gawne's girl won't be seen praychin' like a man, and drivin' a herrin'-cart like a man. Thou 'lt be wearin' men's trousers next. Joost as if there warn' no young fellow as thought her good enough to do it for her. Why can't ye kape company with John Thomas? he 's a sight better-lookin' nor thy ould dad that thou 'rt always kissin' and fondlin'.'

'Plenty of young fellows think well enough of old Ned Gawne's girl to want to drive her cart to market,' the girl replied with spirit, 'but Mirry-Ann hasn't seen the man yet whom she thinks well enough of to accept a favour from him.'

'Thou 'rt the mortal spit of thy mawther, chile, the mortal spit, as pervokin' as a mackerel when they 're playin' all roun' and too full in the belly to touch the bate.'

The hot ale quieted him, and the old man was soon in bed whimpering himself to sleep.

Mirry-Ann closed the cottage door softly behind her and walked down the village street to pick up news of the fishing.

In half-an-hour's time small companies of fishermen, each carrying a bundle over his shoulder tied up in a bright cotton handkerchief, came through the village. The village of Colby lay some little distance from the port. The little band of men decreased in numbers as one by one they came to

their homes. 'Good-night, mates.' 'Good-night, John William,' and another and yet another turned abruptly from his companions into the shelter of his low thatched cottage, until at the end of the street only a straggling one or two were left. News of the 'take' had been passed by word of mouth the length of the village, for the wives standing at the doors ready for the men's return called out the news to each other in their shrill, clear Manx voices. Old Ned Gawne's cottage was at the outskirt of the village. John Thomas met Mirry-Ann a few yards from her door.

'Good-evening, John Thomas,' she said, 'what luck have you had?'

John Thomas walked towards her home and dropped his bundle on the doorstep. A twinge of resentment swept over the girl's face. What right had he to plant his bundle down on her doorstep as though he were her man?

'Don't be talking there, John Thomas,' she said rather coldly. 'You'll wake dad, and he's had a bad day; he's turned very frail since you've been gone.'

John Thomas turned and went back to where the girl stood a few feet up the street, but Mirry-Ann still kept her eyes fixed on the red bundle on the white-flagged doorstep, and John Thomas felt compelled to pick it up.

'Not much luck, lass, the herrin' are dreadful

scarce, though John William Kenean 's done mighty well.'

Mirry-Ann had held out her hand in welcome. John Thomas took it respectfully in his, not as a lover may take the hand of the woman he loves, but as one privileged to shake hands with his superior.

'It does seem as if the wicked flourished like a green bay tree; all the luck goin' to his boat, and the man spendin' his time in drink, batin' his wife, and lettin' his childer starve almost. He 's drinkin' over at the port now, not much is comin' home to his wife; some men aren't fit to live.'

Mirry-Ann's hand was her own again.

'John William Kenean isn't fit to die,' she said, 'and he isn't any use living, but there isn't any middle road.'

While she spoke John Thomas looked at her with hungry, devouring eyes; his thoughts had left John William Kenean.

'But thou 'rt lookin' well thyself, lass, and it 's mighty fine puttin' a sight on ye again. Can ould Ned take the cart in the mornin'?'

'No, he 's not fit'; and Mirry-Ann turned her eyes from the young fellow's eager face out to sea.

John Thomas came a little nearer. 'Thou canst always trust to me, Mirry-Ann, and ye know that it 's mortal glad I am to do it for ye.'

'No, thanks, John Thomas, you 're always kind,

it 's very good of you, but we 've arranged about the cart.'

'Who 's got the job?' and he glared with a jealous rage in his eyes. 'Who 's in favour now, Mirry-Ann? art thou kapin' company at last?'

The girl turned to him and spoke very softly, all traces of the Manx dialect had left her voice.

'Have you left your manners out at sea, John Thomas? Driving the cart is dad's business; he can give it to whom he likes.'

'And can't ye be civil enough to tell a fellow who he 's given it to? Who 's been walkin' out with ye, Mirry-Ann?'

'Good-night, John Thomas; seems as if you had forgotten me since you 've been away, for that 's not the way you used to speak to Mirry-Ann.'

'Don't go, Mirry-Ann, don't go,' he said pleadingly. 'I was clane forgettin' myself again, but it seems as if I wass never gettin' a bit nearer to ye for all the months and months that yer kapin' me waitin'.'

'I 'm not keeping you waiting. Oh, won't you ever understand you can never be any nearer? We are old friends, Tom, but that is all; old friends are very dear—won't you be satisfied?'

'I can't, Mirry-Ann, I can't, for I want ye for me wife, and how can ye be axing me to be satisfied with ye for a friend? There 's not much comfort to be got out of being ould friends if ye won't let one

kiss ye at all. Me heart is fillin' me very mouth, and I fale as if I 'd got a terrible thirst at me, and there warn't nothin' but salt water to drink. Mirry-Ann, if ye haven't got no love-falin' in ye yerself, ye might try and fale tender like to one who has. Yer mortal saf'-hearted for other kind of sufferin', Mirry-Ann, makin' such a fuss about a cat when her young ones is drownded, or a bird that's been wounded; it's strange that whan a big lump of a fellow is sufferin' yer heart's as cold as the black marble rocks of Poolvash, yonder.'

'John Thomas, your love for me is all a fancy. I know it is. You're joost an ould mule'; out of sympathy she had dropped into the broad Manx tongue. 'Yer not really lovin' me, but yer joost mad because thou 'rt courtin' a woman that doesn't want to be courted.' She spoke rapidly. 'All the other girls in the village keep company with the first young fellow that walks back with them from their lil' marryin' (Confirmation). They don't even ask themselves if they love each other, or if they will make suitable companions to each other through life; they just "walk out" until they've saved enough money to get married; most times the young man hasn't even asked the girl to be his wife.'

'Where's the nade of him axin', Mirry-Ann, when the woman knows? That's joost the sacret of love, Mirry-Ann. The young fellow's always tellin' his young woman the things he fales without spakin'.

Talkin' without words is rale love, lass; they 're joost comin' together, one mind and one heart, but you 're as cold and ould-maidish as ould Nance Quine herself.'

Nance Quine was the *rara avis* of the village, an unmarried woman of over fifty years, and what 's more uncommon still, she was a childless one to boot. It may seem remarkable that the village could supply enough husbands to go all round. But not being over-scrupulous in its ideas of womanly virtue, matters were arranged easily enough. It was better to be womanly than virtuous, and if the Lord had not found a husband for them all, He had at least found a child, so that the woman's heart should not go longing. Everything was in the hands of the Lord, and the fatherless were taught to look upon their lack as all His doing.

Mirry-Ann put her hand gently on the lad's blue coat. 'Nance Quine's ways of thinking are more often to my liking than the ways of the other women, so, I expect, I shall be an old maid. John Thomas, don't be wasting your time—

> "There 's many a belle that I know well,
> Is a-waiting for you in the town."'

She sang the lines of the old song softly, and her rich voice fevered the blood of her lover.

'Gough, lass, just as if I didn't know ye would be glad. Ye haven't got enough love-falin's in ye to be

mad if I walked home, right before yer very eyes, from the matin' with Emily Corrin on me arm.'

'No, John Thomas, I wouldn't. It may be that I have no love-feelings in me, but I can't love a man just because he's courting me.'

'Is that the truth, Mirry-Ann, the honest, clane truth? Have ye no love-falin's in ye, or is it because'—John Thomas's voice grew hoarse—'because I've only got rough ways at me, and I've no larnin', and I'm only a lump of a fellow?' He looked down at his clumsy sea-boots and rough salt-stained breeches. 'But I can fix up a bit to walk out with ye, lass.'

Mirry-Ann laughed, a laugh which was in itself a tender, affectionate answer.

'John Thomas,' she said, 'I like you a thousand times better as you are, in your rough sea-boots, than when you've fixed yourself up to walk out. Dad's always in his rough sea-things, and I love every inch of them.'

A look of sheepish misery came over his sunburnt face; it was as if the girl had struck him.

'Don't ye like me new walkin'-out suit, Mirry-Ann? they cost a powerful lot of money. If ye don't like me when I'm fixed up, lass, there ain't no hope lef'.'

There was silence for a few moments; the girl's heart smote her for the pain she had caused her lover.

'I'm going in now, John Thomas,' was her only answer.

'Why, Mirry-Ann?'

'Because we've talked foolishly long enough. I suppose love, like everything else that is worth having, is powerful hard to get.'

'If I mayn't kiss ye, Mirry-Ann, let me come in and have a bit of radin' joost to give me a bit of welcome like,' and he stepped into the kitchen.

He knew as well as Mirry-Ann did where the Bibles were kept; without asking, he opened the little press between the fireplace and the window and took down the books. His keen eyes caught sight of some volumes, with strange bindings, on the higher shelf, and a disagreeable expression came over his face. They were a few of the books Mirry-Ann had brought with her from the college in Liverpool. John Thomas gave them an angry push which sent them out of sight. Mirry-Ann noticed the childish display of temper, but made no remark.

John Thomas hated the books because they reminded him that Mirry-Ann had a precious world all of her own wherein he could never travel. He knew that her books were the only friends who really understood her and who could sympathise with her in her lonely life.

She asked softly, 'What shall we read, John Thomas?'

'Whatever the Book opens at; it isn't for the likes of me to be showin' any preference at all.'

John Thomas sat himself down with a small Bible at one end of the table which was placed along the wall under the window, and Mirry-Ann sat at the other with her uncle's big Bible before her.

The book opened at the fourth chapter of the Song of Solomon. It was their custom to read the passage chosen, verse and verse about; John Thomas always a little haltingly and not entirely free from embarrassment, Mirry-Ann in a clear, low voice.

'*Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks; thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from Mount Gilead.*'

At the end of the chapter John Thomas rose abruptly.

'Mighty lovin' words about a Church, Mirry-Ann.'

His heart was almost suffocating him, the girl heard his laboured breath. He was surprised that hearing Mirry-Ann read a few verses from the Bible had no subduing effect on his feelings. Indeed, while he listened, the longing for the woman he loved seemed to grow until it devastated his whole being. He could scarcely command his voice to say good-night.

What particular tabernacle of beauty the girl thought had inspired the love-song she did not divulge. John Thomas had never questioned the fact of its being the Church.

'Good-night, John Thomas, dad will be glad to see you in the morning.'

'Good-night, Mirry-Ann,' he almost whispered; he would not trust himself to look into the eyes that were like doves' eyes within her locks. 'Good-night, lass,' and without taking her offered hand he went out into the street.

Pleasant words of welcome were called out to him as he passed the few remaining houses in the village, but John Thomas scarcely heard them, he was walking off the fever of love that held him in its grip.

'Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet and thy speech is comely.' The words preyed upon his tongue until he could feel his lips pressed against the girl's sweet mouth. As if to get rid of the spell of the song he repeated the words aloud—'"Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." 'Deed, there is no spot in Mirry-Ann, that's sure and sartin; she's that pure and heavenly-lookin' that a fellow can scarcely enjoy thinkin' about her without seemin' to defile her. The words might have been writ about Mirry-Ann herself, and yet it's the Bible I'm singin'. Didn't seem to open at a very quietin' part this evenin'. Now if it had been Revelations, it would maybe have drove the woman out of my head. It's strange, though, for all I never thought, but her eyes is joost like doves'—all saf' and never very sure of bein' the same colour for five

minutes at a time. If Mirry-Ann 's vexed there 's a powerful lot of quare light in them, shinin' like the lauthan on the water at night, but when she 's gentle-like to the ould man, or to some beast that 's took bad, it 's clane blue they are, like the sea round Bradda Head, and no mistake about it. Strange that the words of the Bible should be suitin' a Colby girl like that. Her lips wass joost like a thread of scarlet as sartin as she wass readin' the words. But women are mortal quare things. Some of them 's like black-berries when they 've got the "club," just sick-ripe an' droppin' off the bushes into yer very han's until there ain't no worth in eatin' them, and some of them wants all the nursin' and coaxin', like a paych on a garden wall, before they will become saf' like.'

When Mirry-Ann closed the door softly behind her lover, the old man's voice called out from the small room overhead.

'Wass that John Thomas, Mirry-Ann?'

'Yes, dad, but I thought you were asleep.'

'Too fas' to hear thy courtin', chile, but not fas' enough but that I knew you wass doin' it for all.'

'John Thomas wasn't courtin', dad, it was the Bible we were reading.'

The old man chuckled.

'Didn't I court my old wom-an fifty years ago radin' the Bible, an' didn't her father before her

court his wom-an the same way? My Gough, chile, thou 'rt only tellin' me the ould, ould story, an' it 's mortal glad I am to hear it, for John Thomas is a smart young fellow, and he 's got a nice house at him and a bit of lan'. Now I can go to sleep contented like.'

'Good-night, dad; I tell you we weren't courting; it 's a strange thing if reading the Bible is to be considered love-making.' The girl spoke impatiently as she hurriedly prepared to go to bed, as if the final shutting of the door would shut out the memory of John Thomas. The love in his eyes was distasteful to her pure nature, for very little more than speech removed him from the brute creation.

CHAPTER III

A VILLAGE day begins early. Soon after the sun had risen the next morning Mirry-Ann was up and busy about her household duties. The chickens had to be fed, and the old man's breakfast put ready for him on the stove. Cottage doors were opening one after another all the way down the street; the little ones, always eager to anticipate the arrival of a new day, were crawling about half-dressed by the cottage door stones, while their mothers kindled a fire in the kitchen grate. Thin trails of blue smoke commenced to shoot up into the clear blue overhead. A new day was beginning over land and sea; the stillness of the long village night was past, each moment brought fresh signs of awakened life.

Mirry-Ann left her own breakfast untasted, for it was necessary that the cart should be down at the port as early as possible. Her uncle had a small share in John Thomas's nickie, and it had always been his custom to take a cart-load of herrings round the neighbourhood as soon as they arrived in the harbour.

Of late years most of the herrings had been disposed of wholesale from the boats to the kippering houses in Douglas and Liverpool, and the carts had not stopped on their way through the village, but the old man retained the right to sell his small share in retail quantities.

With the opening of the kippering houses herrings went up in price; Mirry-Ann could now sell them at the rate of a shilling a dozen. Her uncle recalled the days when he had known them sold as low as a hundred for a shilling, and the history of the island relates how one year there was such a glut in the market that they were used for manuring the land.

There was some surprise among the men at the Port when they saw Mirry-Ann Gawne waiting in her cart down on the little pier, but when she told them that the old man was getting past his work, and that she had come to take his herrings, they made the job as easy for the girl as possible; they had long been accustomed to treat her with a respect and courtesy they never showed the other village girls, due in some manner to her superior education, but principally the outcome of her personality.

As Mirry Gawne's cart passed through the village she was surrounded by eager buyers. Little children and aged men had been watching for the cart, plate in hand. The old men picked out the herrings for themselves, taking good value for their money,

while the little ones who could not reach up to the high-set cart handed up their plates with their money on them. Mirry-Ann was seated in the orthodox fashion at the end of the long flat cart, set on two high wheels. The mass of glittering herrings was well displayed, the flatness of the cart saved them from becoming bruised by their own weight.

Nance Quine brought out her plate of rare old blue willow-pattern, which had once graced other kitchen dressers than the small one in the old maid's home.

'What art thou doin' drivin' the cart? where's thy uncle?'

'In bed,' Mirry-Ann answered, while she counted out a dozen herrings. 'He's scarcely able to crawl with rheumatism; he's been past work these last few months.'

Nance peered under the pink sun-bonnet the girl had put on to screen her face.

'Did John Thomas want to take it—is that why thou art doin' it, poor chile?'

'Fresh herrings! fresh herrings!' echoed again through the village street. 'Fresh herrings, twelve a shilling!'

Nance Quine took her plateful of herrings from Mirry-Ann, who said quietly, 'I could have sold them all to the curing-house straight from the boat, but I can make more off them this way, and I could

scarcely have got back from Douglas till this afternoon. I can clear the cart before mid-day in the village. There's not been one through for a couple of weeks.'

The horse moved on again, for there was no time to be lost, and the last plate had been served.

At the foot of a long shady lane leading up to an old-fashioned Manx farmhouse, Mirry-Ann saw the figure of a young man waving for the cart to stop.

'Hi, there, stop, can't you—I want some herrings!'

But the cart still went on, and the figure seated at its end did not respond to the waving of the handkerchief. With a bound the young man had jumped the wall of the lane and run across the angle of the meadow which skirted the high road. In a few minutes he was even with the cart.

'Didn't you hear? I want some herrings; can't you stop!' he shouted. 'I've knocked my shins on that beastly wall trying to catch you up. Oh! I beg your pardon . . . Mirry . . . I never dreamt it was you. But, dear, why on earth are you driving a herring-cart?'

'Good-morning, sir; how many herrings do you wish? They're beauties this morning, just out of the boat.' She took no notice of his question.

'I don't know, I forget. Mrs. Hedges asked me to get her some, half-a-dozen, I think; but tell me, Mirry, is your uncle ill? Why are you doing this?' There was a touch of anger in his voice.

'Oh, please sir, don't talk to me. I didn't stop my cart because I knew it was you; you know you promised——'

'Promised what?' The young man was gazing in utter bewilderment at the beauty of the girl's eyes below her pink sun-bonnet. 'Promised that I wouldn't buy herrings from you, I certainly never did.'

'No, promised that you wouldn't——' she hesitated, 'speak to me as if we were friends.—I want you to remember that I 'm only a village girl.'

She was such a gross caricature of a village fish-wife, that for the moment before he answered, as if to remind her of the fact, his eyes rested on her slim ankles dangling over the end of the cart, and then on her delicately-shaped hands, soft and brown as berries, picking out the slippery, shining herrings. Not one point of her rough dress was worn for effect, yet there was something pathetically ludicrous in her attempt to look suited to the part she was playing.

Young Schofield laughed, first with his eyes only, but when they met hers, full of a sweet embarrassment, he laughed outright.

'How can I remember to remember that I 'm to forget? Besides, Mirry, you never said we might not be friends; I was to remember to forget something else.'

The girl laughed. 'I said remember, sir.'

'Yes, but first I have to remember that I am to

forget, and I don't want to forget. Would you be glad if I forgot, little Mirry?'

A hot blush mounted over the girl's throat and face; she could not answer truthfully 'Yes,' for her heart cried out No.

'Sevenpence, please,' was all she said as she held out the fish with a trembling hand.

'Have *you* managed to forget?' The young man held on to the plate and looked into her eyes for an answer. 'Have you managed to forget the thing that will be sweetest in our life to remember? Have you forgotten that two nights ago the whole world was beautiful for us, because we loved each other? Can a woman so easily forget, Mirry?'

'I manage to pretend I've forgotten; couldn't you do the same for my sake?' There was a ring of genuine entreaty in her voice.

'What a brute I've been! forgive me,' he said softly; 'but why shouldn't I see and speak to you, if I mayn't love you? Why shouldn't we at least be friends, just because an old man has an idea that every man who doesn't belong to the people must be a born scoundrel? Do I look like a scoundrel? My coat is very old, I know, but I could "fix up for Sundays, and courtin' Mirry-Ann,"' he said, laughing, and unconsciously using almost John Thomas's very words of the night before in his imitation of the dialect.

The girl had no wish to be seen speaking to Mr.

Schofield in the village street. Already it had been remarked that Mirry-Ann was takin' it mortal aisy. 'But it takes some folks longer to buy twelve fish nor others,' they said jokingly, as the cart moved slowly on, followed by Dick Schofield.

The girl kept her eyes on the herrings, and the young man kept his discreetly divided between her ankles and the dusty high-road.

'I 've been up to the Druid's chapel every evening since, Mirry,' he said, looking at her with eyes of reproach.

'I told you I would never come again, sir.'

'But why not? where was the harm, dear? Twice we sat for an hour at sunset and discussed archæology among the Druidical remains, and the other times I happened to be fishing while you were walking by the stream. If we have the power to raise up human flesh and blood out of dry bones, surely the gods have smiled upon us. We never willingly or with intention fell in love; it just came, Mirry!'

The girl was too honest and downright to console her conscience with a subterfuge.

'If there was no harm in it, sir, I should tell my uncle. I can't deceive him, indeed I can't.'

The cart was nearing old Ned Gawne's cottage, and young Schofield knew it, so he reluctantly said good-bye. When he lifted his hat he showed a close-cut head of fair brown hair. He was by no means a

good-looking young man, but there was something attractive in his plainness which was almost more distinctive than mere good looks.

Some people are uninteresting through the very perfection of their good looks; young Schofield was good-looking through his very imperfections. There is a nice kind of ugliness amongst men, which has a much more deadly effect upon women than the most perfect type of an Adonis. A woman's tenderness for faults in her ideal extends even to his looks. Besides, Dick Schofield had some curious tricks of facial expression which one learnt to look for. When he laughed, for instance, the rather deeply marked lines round his mouth relaxed, and two provoking and unexpected dimples appeared in their place. Then, again, his eyes, which were really the best feature in his face, almost closed when he laughed, while all that remained of them positively gleamed with humour. He had gone by the name of 'Slits' at school.

The best thing that can be said for his appearance was that he wore dilapidated grey tweeds, and a very sun-burned straw hat, as if from choice, and because his breeding permitted, and not from necessity. And for his character, it is not the least necessary that he should be either better or cleverer than any other young man of his day because Mirry-Ann loved him. For the best and most lovable of women have never loved men for what others see good in them, but for

what they themselves have found and are pleased to think that no one else has discovered.

When the young man was out of sight Mirry-Ann took off her sun-bonnet for a moment to let the fresh air blow over her heated face and hair. Sun-bonnets are warm things even in cool weather, and this early summer day was one of typical island beauty; the air was soft and warm though delightfully tempered at times by a breeze from the sea.

She fanned herself for a moment with the ample brim of the bonnet, and then tied the cotton strings under her chin; letting the hood fall back over her hair behind. The breezes caught what tendrils of her hair were allowed to stray and blew them into curls.

Something more than the morning sun had heightened the colour in her cheeks, and her heart was panting like the fluttering of a bird's wings.

Was this then the 'love-falin'' of which John Thomas spoke, this unaccountable physical weakness in the presence of the loved one? She, poor child, was so amazed at the sudden betrayal by her own heart, and at the realisation that even the purest physical emotions have nothing on earth to do with the will or moral choice, that a curious resentment filled her mind against the man who had thus awakened her.

She had no wish to love him (not that she considered him in any way unworthy of being loved),

and it distressed her to find that in spite of her prayers for help and strength to conquer her love, she now found that physically his magnetism for her was greater than before. It was as if two beings in one person were at war with one another; her prayer was that the will should conquer. To love a man against your will was submitting the will to the body. In her Methodist upbringing moral choice was expected to govern all things. Dick Schofield had no religious feeling in common with her, he did not understand her desire for spiritual companionship in their love, he looked upon her devout belief as a gentle, womanly attribute; he was a man to whom all expression of religion appeared feminine, or part of a curate's profession.

How clearly she remembered learning the rules of her people written by the great John Wesley himself, and his directions on the choice of a husband! First she had learnt them in Manx from her uncle, and then at the chapel Sunday-School in English.

'*No person belonging to the society* (of Methodists) *to marry with an unbeliever, or any person who does not fear God or walk in his ways. Neither should they take any steps in matrimony but in the fear of God, with earnest prayer for His guidance, with the advice and desire of their Christian friends.*'

'*Seailchya my ihiggey lesh yn cill agns wheeghyn gyn come.*' (*Not permitting or yielding to the body in needless things.*)

The girl said these words to herself in Manx. They were stern rules that her memory recalled. She continued:

'*No playing of games which cannot be used properly in the name of the Lord Jesus; such as dancing, card-playing, sporting entertainments or horse-racing, as none of these can agree with the words of the apostles.*

'*Singing such songs, or reading such books, as those which cannot lead to the knowledge and love of God.*'

As she was repeating the rules to herself half mechanically, in the exact order in which they came in her little Manx text-book, just as one often repeats a simple prayer taught in infancy in a moment of doubt or emergency, a voice broke in on her reverie—'Good-morning, Mirry-Ann.'

'Good-morning, sir,' she answered in a startled voice, for it was difficult to bring her mind suddenly back from the old days, when she had learnt the stern teaching of John Wesley standing by her uncle's chair, with no fear in her young heart but that she would find it simple to keep them faithfully in word and spirit, to the practical present, when each fresh step even in her quiet life seemed to reveal a new army of temptations.

'What a Jack-of-all-trades you are, Mirry-Ann,' the voice said, 'preaching at sundown and driving a herring-cart in the morning; you don't leave the young fellows a chance.'

'The young men have got chances enough already, sir; it 's we women who are handicapped.'

The Squire, for it was he, laughed pleasantly.

'I had no idea you were such an advanced young woman; what special grudge have you against us to-day?—you 're well in the race this morning, I fancy'; and he scanned the highroad for any sign of another herring-cart. He was out for his morning ride, and he took good care to keep his horse at an even pace with the cart, so that he was level with the pretty profile under the sun-bonnet.

'I'm quite as well able to drive a herring-cart, and count out a dozen herrings at a time to my customers, as any young man in the village; and yet, simply because I am a woman, every one seems to think I am doing something extraordinary.' Mirry-Ann spoke bitterly. 'If I can cook a herring, why may I not sell it?'

'Because you aren't quite an ordinary sort of a woman, Mirry-Ann. Now if Mrs. Quayle was sitting where you are, perhaps there wouldn't be so many remarks passed.'

The girl pulled the hood of her bonnet further over her head. It partly hid her confusion, but when the Squire laughed she laughed too, for Mrs. Quayle was the ugliest old woman in the village. Her sex might easily have been mistaken, for Nature had bestowed upon her a strong red beard, and her hair was cut short like a man's.

'Please forgive me for laughing,' he said, 'I 'm awfully rude, but you 've no idea how'—he was going to say 'charming' but changed the word —'unsuitable you look as a fishwife. It 's like a get-up for a fancy bazaar.'

'Why, sir, I 'm dressed just like this every morning at home. You 've only seen me in my best frock, when I 'm "fixed" up.' She used the expression sarcastically.

'Because I 've not had the pleasure of being in your home since I came back; when may I come?'

'We 're here now, sir,' and Mirry-Ann jumped so quickly out of the cart that the Squire found no chance of helping her. She disappeared into the low-roofed cottage and in another moment brought out a rough, blue stone plate. She piled it high with the slippery glittering herrings and took it back to the cottage.

'Of course, this is your home, I remember it quite well now,' he said, looking round the spotlessly clean cottage with its low, white-washed walls. The flagged floor was sprinkled with silver sand from the sea-shore, and a tailless Manx cat sat blinking in the stream of sunlight that shot through the small window and warmed a spot on the floor.

'How it brings back the old days,' he went on; 'your uncle in his chair, and the Bible press; everything is just the very same; only you are changed, Mirry-Ann.'

It was essentially a fisherman's cottage, furnished with the plainest necessities of life, but there was an indefinite air of refinement about it, depending principally on an absence of cheap ornaments and bright-coloured prints which adorned the walls of the other cottages in the village. The kitchen-parlour was delightfully cool and home-like; the bunch of dog-roses and honeysuckle on the table was arranged, with an eye for colour, in an old blue china bowl.

The Squire had fastened the bridle of his horse to a branch of the fuchsia tree which almost covered the front of the cottage; bees were busy over its honey all day long, while the white butterflies chased each other round the lilac and the rosemary bush which grew under the fuchsia tree close to the door.

Frank Christian had followed the girl into the cottage, but, when she held up her hand to warn him to be quiet, he went back and stood near the open door watching her move about her little house. Mirry-Ann was so perfectly symmetrical that until he had seen her in this low-roofed cottage he had not realised that she was tall; she was in fact quite as tall as Grace, his sister, whom he had always considered beyond the average height in women. It was a practical lesson in the beauty of proportion; besides, he became aware as he watched Mirry-Ann that Grace was a little too slender for her height.

In the corner-seat by the fire old Ned Gawne sat fast asleep.

'I don't want to wake him,' she said softly, 'until I have sold all the fish; he doesn't like me taking the cart.'

The fluttering of her heart and the startled confusion of her senses when she was speaking to Dick Schofield had now entirely subsided. She was a woman of a naturally quiet and shy disposition, and her lonely life with only her old uncle for a companion had taught her a considerable amount of self-repression and reserve. It is difficult to describe in mere words the subtle fascination and physical charm which endears and softens a woman of a dignified and self-contained nature, for words are a poor medium to convey the magnetism of such womanhood, and its precious gift of human sympathy. Mirry-Ann's nature was not one of exuberant vivacity; she was lacking in a hundred characteristics peculiar to such natures—to women of a gayer and lighter heart.

Part of her charm may have been due to the illumination of spiritual grace which glorifies the women of Perugino. The trembling of divine beauty in a woman's eyes touches every chord in a man's nature, in whatever mould he is cast. Beauty has divers means of manifestation, but the beauty of holiness is undisputed.

On this particular day the Squire was granted

only a few more words with Mirry-Ann, but in the days which immediately followed he found himself very much at home in Ned Gawne's cottage. The old man strangely enough forgot his usual resentment towards the upper classes, and his long grudge against them, when he was talking to his young Squire as he called him. He had, it is true, no fancy to let Mirry-Ann talk much with him, for the less a woman had to say to any man but the man she meant to marry, the better, and he bitterly resented her occasionally forgetting to address the Squire as sir. But it was sufficient pleasure and amusement in the long summer days for the young man to watch the girl in her quiet daily life, while he smoked a pipe with her uncle and listened again to the old sea-yarns he had heard when he was a child. Like most of the old people in the island, Ned Gawne was steeped in the superstition of the Celtic races. Although the old Manx customs, half Pagan in their origin, and the open belief in evil spirits, were fast dying out in the island, local superstitions were too deeply ingrained in their nature to be totally uprooted in one generation.

In old Ned's fishing days no boat would ever be the third to leave the harbour; even to this day, perhaps out of long custom, the Squire knew, but had never questioned why, the fleet went out in a body. If one boat went ahead by favour of the wind, the next two would be tied together in case

one should fall behind and become the unlucky third. The Squire used to ask the old man almost daily, half in fun and half in earnest, what particular festival it was in the Manx Calendar, and what had taken place on that day in the good old time, before the young people suffered from compulsory education and grew too wise to believe in or reverence the customs of their forefathers. It was interesting to both Dick Schofield and the Squire to note how these old beliefs still played their part in the daily lives of the people. Sometimes it was just to amuse the children, they would say, and at other times the excuse would be that it was mere habit, but the superstitions prevailed all the same, and a few of the old practices were kept up.

Mirry-Ann knew that John Thomas Costain still carried in his breast pocket the feathers of a 'witch-wren' to preserve him from shipwreck. He had carried them ever since the time when he, along with other boys of the village, had gone out with sticks and stones to slaughter every wren in the neighbourhood in the hope that they would catch the witch-wren. The poor little wren when slain was put on a pole decked with evergreens and bright streaming ribbons, and was then carried in triumph through the village on St. Stephen's Day. Before daylight on the dark December morning dedicated to the martyr, bands of boys carrying a witch-wren bush would visit all the houses in the

neighbourhood, beginning at the big houses and well-stocked farms, and ending in the village. There are often as many as three Wren bushes in one village, and there is great rivalry over the splendour of their decoration, and anxiety to be the first 'bush' to visit the big houses, for the first comers are best served—only coppers are given later in the day where silver is bestowed early in the morning. The Captain of each successive bush is always strong in his persuasions that the witch-wren on his bush is the bona-fide witch-wren, and that the others are merely common willow-wrens or linnets.

So in the early dawn of St. Stephen's Day, more commonly known as Hunt-the-Wren Day, the inmates of a big house are waked from their sleep by the words of the old song which every Manx boy knows by heart—

'We'll away to the woods, says Robin to the Bobbin,
We'll away to the woods, says Richard to Robin,
We'll away to the woods, says Jack the Land,
We'll away to the woods, says every one.'

The song goes on until the death of poor Jenny Wren—with sticks and stones—has been related.

The Manxman's common fear of witches, his secret wearing of charms to keep away ill-luck, and his dread of evil spells, mingle very curiously with his simple and pious belief in God. He hardly ever speaks without some reference to God's Almighty hand, and yet in old Ned's youth it was no un-

common thing to see a pair of tongs laid across a child's cradle to protect it from the fairies, or to hear that some young mother, at the birth of her child, had asked a friend to carry a lighted candle up a flight of stairs above the room where the child was born, so that it might grow up high-minded.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE in the quiet village flowed evenly along, yet each day, unmarked as it passed, was helping to unfold the tragedies of lives which outwardly seemed too simple and uneventful to deserve recording. Each day brought Mirry-Ann and Dick Schofield closer together, while each day only proved that love was a torment, a disturbing element. The girl's life without love had been restful and devout; with, it was vexed and remorseful.

Every vow she made to resist the joy of meeting her lover, was made futile by the working of fate. The opportunity would be forced upon her when she least sought it, and the enemy would usurp the situation. Love was forcing the hand of the young Squire too; had his will been strong enough he would have flown from the danger while it still lay ambushed, for each day while he lingered it was growing more ready to assail his unguarded moments. Love, the destroyer, had entered the village, and before his work was done many hearts were to fall beneath his hand.

Consisting as the village did of but one long street

forming part of the main highroad from Port Erin to Castletown, with a few outlying houses nestling in the shadow of Mount Barrule, Mirry-Ann found it almost impossible to avoid meeting either Dick Schofield, or the Squire, every day. Their desire to see her naturally drew their steps towards the village. She had given up taking her book or work to some favourite spot in the glen or mountain-side; for if Dick Schofield did not find her in the village and steal a few words with her every evening, he would scour the countryside till he found her, and Mirry-Ann had learnt by experience that it is easier to keep a lover at a distance in the public thoroughfare of a village than when alone with him under the influenc of romantic surroundings.

The social position Dick Schofield held in the village was peculiar, and from a mercenary point of view he was far from being as good a match for Mirry-Ann as plain John Thomas. Grace Christian hit the mark, perhaps, as nearly as any one, when she described him one day in a fit of temper as Mrs. Hedges' nursery-governess. Mrs. Hedges was a 'foreigner,' as the Colby villagers designated any one not born and bred in the island, but one whom they respected, for she was clever enough to make a living, for herself and four children, off farming a small property which her husband had bought a few years before his death.

Dick Schofield had accepted, from necessity, the position of tutor, at a salary of sixty pounds a year, to Mrs. Hedges' three sons. When that wise woman realised that it would cost her less to educate three boys upon the principle on which she herself had been educated, namely an underpaid governess divided among four daughters, she advertised for a tutor, firm in the belief that there was an eager soul somewhere in this crowded world waiting to fill any post. Her theory proved correct. She had forty offers from which to pick and choose. Besides teaching the boys, the tutor was expected to help Mrs. Hedges with the farm accounts, but the advantages she had to offer were certainly very tempting to a poor young man fond of country life—good rough shooting, some trout and sea fishing, and an interesting island to explore.

Mrs. Hedges, in choosing young Schofield, trusted solely to her intuitive judgment of human nature. She scorned references; they took up a great deal of precious time, and after all were of little value, for, as she said truly, 'you can always get some respectable person to tell a lie about a scoundrel, just to get him out of the way and decently employed.'

Dick Schofield had been brought up with the idea that his father was a wealthy man, and that as he, Dick, was his only son, his going to a good public school, and afterwards to Oxford, was not so much

a matter of education as of social status. He had come out of both with a poor education and a good reputation for games, also an amazing capacity for absorbing knowledge with the least possible amount of work.

But alas! before he had taken his degree or considered the question of his future career for more than a quarter of an hour at a time, his father had died insolvent, and he and his sister were left orphans—dependent upon a maiden aunt for a temporary home.

His sister soon found a situation as governess in a wealthy stockbroker's family, the sort of people who live in a large villa in a new suburb. But young Schofield became aware that the openings for young men who are cast adrift in the world with no particular training for any particular work are considerably fewer than those open to women. Six months after they were left penniless his sister was earning her living somehow, while he was still subsisting on the charity of an aunt who never lost an opportunity of telling him that she, his aunt, would break stones on the road (although she had no wish to see him so employed in her respectable London suburb) before she would remain idle while his sister worked. What truly great men have been born women! For had all the women who have seen themselves deprived of greatness owing to their sex been born men, heroes would be too

general to be noticed, and greatness would be at a discount.

Young Schofield's aunt, who had an income of about £600 a year, used to point out the fact that women could always earn a living, because, rather than be dependent upon charity, they would become household drudges on a salary of £30 a year. But young men had no such pride. It did not dawn upon the good lady that the simple reason why these governesses are paid £30 a year by the same people who would not dare to offer a tutor £70 or even a £100, is because they are willing and eager to give their services for £30 a year. If they would, one and all, band themselves together and refuse to give their brains and the best years of their lives for this miserable pittance, their salaries would soon rise, and the mothers of large families would recognise that four girls could no longer be educated for £30 a year, while one son cost £90 at least at a boarding school.

When Mrs. Hedges advertised for a tutor for her sons (the eldest was too delicate to go to school) Dick Schofield told his aunt that he had applied for the situation.

'You 'll never get it,' she said; 'what do you know about teaching little boys?'

'As much as my sister knows about teaching little girls, I suppose,' he said. 'She was never trained for the work.'

'Women can always adapt themselves.'

'Another reason why they are so often "put upon,"' he replied. 'It's a fatal mistake to let selfish people know your full value, it's like dipping into your capital. For, taken collectively, my dear aunt, the world is very selfish, and a good bargain appeals to the most benevolent-hearted.'

The young tutor came and made himself so 'beastly useful,' as he himself expressed it, that no one knew (least of all himself) where his duties left off and his good-nature began. Indeed he gradually slipped into the place of father or elder brother to the bundle of children—which had been hurried into the world with such alarming rapidity that their father's untimely death was perhaps the only way Providence saw for preventing their ultimate starvation. In depriving the children of their father, Providence caused no appreciable difference in their lives (it was at the best a negligible quantity) beyond the fact that after his decease the youngest was not always in arms.

Dick Schofield hung up his hat in the hall, so to speak, and the presence of a man about the house eased Mrs. Hedges' mind at night, for the house was lonely, yet it was only after her day's work was done that Mrs. Hedges had time to be afraid. She was a very able woman, with the same knack of rearing a fine class of animals for her farm as she had of rearing fine sons for her country. It is true that at times

she treated her animals as if they were children, and her children as if they were animals, but perhaps she was to be forgiven, for she had, poor soul, little time for fine distinctions, and it is doubtful if a boy's gift of tongue commends him to a busy woman's mercy more than the silence of other domestic animals. She had been known to sit up all night, her woman's heart aching with tender pity for the slim brown cow she had reared from a calf, in the trouble of its first-born, yet the same woman had turned her second son—with her own hot Irish blood in his veins—out to do farm labour, and live on farm fare, for reading in bed by candle-light.

It would have been almost impossible for the most evangelical scandal-monger to impute any scandal from the position the young tutor held in the household. Mrs. Hedges was a busy worker, scarcely conscious of her own sex. By her practical and casual treatment of all men she managed to place them on a footing of equality with herself, which aroused their admiration while it robbed her of any claims to tenderness or femininity.

It was a pleasant happy life for the young man, and the days slipped by far too easily; he often wondered if his aunt would consider that he had become drudge enough to claim her admiration. If he had, then all he could tell her was that governesses are not to be pitied.

It was easy for Mrs. Hedges to forget that for

doing all that a useful husband or a thoughtful son is generally expected to do—and seldom does—this young man only received £60 a year. Besides, did he receive it? It had devolved upon him to pay the farm servants their weekly wages, and sometimes the little sack grew empty before his own turn came, the widow's cruse ran dry. She never knew it, poor soul, but remained happy in the belief that her tutor paid himself regularly when he drew the money for the farm wages.

Sometimes the nursery-governess found it his duty to tell Mrs. Hedges that part of the money in the little sack must be spent on a new dress for herself, and he would point out, very tactfully, how her position demanded that the village dressmaker should now and again be given a piece of new material out of which to shape a dress, just for the sake of her credit. Then an excursion would be made to buy the material, and how Dick Schofield longed to see this hard-working mother for once do justice to the few good points Nature had bestowed upon her. But Mrs. Hedges invariably bought a certain class of stout material, not because it suited her, but because it wore well, too well the young man thought, if its unattractiveness was any guide in the matter.

Mrs. Hedges, like many other healthy, capable women, seldom thought; she worked by instinct. Thinking with her was a waste of time and seldom

ended satisfactorily. If she had given a thought to the fact that the time must come when her nursery governess would necessarily leave her, her indomitable energy might have collapsed. And young Schofield was wont to close his mind to the thought as well, for after taking the burden of this woman's battles upon his shoulders, and allowing her unconsciously to rely upon him, he was too tender-hearted to break the chains he had forged for himself. But during the last few months, since his acknowledged love for Mirry-Ann had tuned his thoughts to a different key, the longing for a home of his own, if ever so humble, shared with the woman he loved, in place of practical Mrs. Hedges, had grown more and more insistent. He was beginning to realise that a lifetime cannot pass in even the quietest surroundings in a totally negative condition. Sooner or later something comes to disturb the even tenor of a peaceful existence, and Mirry-Ann Gawne had disturbed his.

To Grace Christian of Ballaugh, Dick Schofield always spoke of himself as Mrs. Hedges' nursery-governess, and very often he took an impudent delight in doing little womanly offices for the younger children when he was well aware that Grace was there to see. Grace pretended to despise him for this, and for his lack of ambition, but in her heart she was softened into a sweeter woman when she noted how tenderly he nursed the eldest boy when he was

seized with one of his violent headaches, the lingering result of venturing to a magpie's nest on the rotten branch of a tall fir-tree.

Why, Grace asked herself, should Mrs. Hedges—with a family figure and a weakness for rearing black pigs—have the power to make a young man sacrifice himself to her service? Why did he never show her, Grace Christian of Ballaugh, the same charming deference and unspoken regard? She had shown him every attention socially that lay in her power; she considered him dull and unenterprising not to use the chances she had given him of entering into a flirtation with herself, *pour passer le temps!* If he had risen to the occasion, in all probability the flirtation would have been of brief duration, for no *affaire de cœur* had ever amused her for any length of time. But perversity, which lies at the root of many a love affair, willed that because Dick Schofield had proved totally indifferent to the power of her beauty, and had not vanity enough to be flattered by her attentions, her pique should grow into something stronger. She allowed her annoyance and her determination of making him love her to dominate her mind; her life was lonely and there was little else to think about.

She was particularly vexed one morning by his almost bored expression and complete indifference to her most engaging advances. She had assumed a gentleness rather foreign to her nature, and had simulated an interest in the most trivial matters

concerning himself. She knew that even the most interesting man is more interested in himself than in any one else, and that to a man a sympathetic woman usually means the good listener. She had tried archæology, knowing that he had just returned from a visit to Glen Darrah to see the most perfect remains of a Druidical temple in the island, and it had failed. Dick Schofield was certainly not in an amusing humour.

'Going to take the children out for a walk?' she said, with a glance of humour in her scornful eyes, as he rose to say good-bye.

'No, jam-making,' he answered simply. 'Mrs. Hedges wants the last of the raspberries picked this afternoon, she's afraid of rain. You see what a good housekeeper I've become. I know all about it —dry fruit, a pound of sugar to a pound of fruit, a clear fire, and no vanity concerning your complexion.'

'Perhaps I'll come and help to pick,' she said sweetly, 'one must do something.'

'You'll get your fingers badly pricked. I'd advise you not.'

Grace looked at her fingers, it gave her an opportunity of displaying them, and they certainly were very charming. But the temptation to amuse herself by being in his company and will him into flirting with her was greater than her vanity.

'What an ungracious person you are,' she said, 'raspberry scratches aren't poisonous.' Her pride

was hurt, and she spoke in her usually rather imperious tones; her voice and manner had been natural and gracious before. 'Tell me,' she said, 'aren't you getting tired of this little place? How can you go on wasting your time here? It's dreadful for a man to have absolutely no ambition.'

Dick Schofield laughed at her childish show of temper, following so quickly upon the rôle of womanly gentleness.

'I don't know,' he said, 'I'm beginning to think that I have some ambition. I want to make more money, there are some things you can't do without money,' he added almost sadly. 'You see, I find I am so "beastly useful" I've no time to be dull. When I'm not performing one of my various domestic duties I've always got fishing and shooting. I haven't had time to see half the island yet. I like it. It's such a jolly, hospitable little place.'

'Oh, I'm not complaining about the island, of course I like it,' the girl said, 'if there was only something to do; the people are all half asleep, they've no energy.'

'I don't know how it is. I've always more to do than I can get through, minding the children, making jam, building new glass houses, and what not.' He laughed at the situation. 'It's just like living in the Colonies,' he said. 'I expect I shall do the washing next.'

'I suppose you'd like to tell me that there's

always something to be done if one chooses to look for it, but I don't want to work, I want to play, and there's no one to play with. I don't care about feeding the few orphans in the village, and interfering with the Wesleyan Bible-reader.'

'I suppose there is more to amuse a man than a girl in a place like this,' he said sympathetically.

'Certainly there is, for I object to flirting with a good-looking fisherman,' she said.

'Well, naturally.'

'Why naturally? Where is your argument—if men of your class don't object to having a flirtation with a pretty fisher girl?'

'What are you insinuating, Miss Christian?' he asked, with the fire of sudden anger lighting up his eyes; 'but stop, perhaps it is wiser left unsaid. You'll only be sorry and wish the words forgotten.'

The girl's pride was up in arms. This young man, a nursery-governess in trousers, at the farm, dictating to her in this way. In her heart she rather liked his tone of authority and was ready to apologise, but her pride would not let her. Grace Christian would be very sick before she was sorry.

'You're quite mistaken, Mr. Schofield,' she said. 'I shall certainly never be sorry to you. I mean what I say when I tell you that you and my brother, the only two people with whom I can associate in

this dull village, are turning the head of that preaching girl, Mirry-Ann Gawne. Oh, you needn't deny it, I 'm a woman, so I know what is likely to turn a girl's head.'

Dick Schofield was fast losing his temper. He had grown almost accustomed to being lectured and patronised in turns by this capricious girl, but this time she had gone too far. She had spoken slightingly of the woman he loved. But for Mirry-Ann's sake he would have enjoyed telling her that he was not flirting with the girl, but persuading her to marry him.

'I had no idea your head was so easily turned, Miss Christian, or I might have tried to exercise my poor powers.' He recognised the impertinence of the remark as soon as he had made it, but he was scarcely prepared for the furious blush that burnt her neck and face.

'Are we to be judged from the same standpoint? What affects my housemaid would scarcely affect me. I am out of the question altogether.'

'Then please leave me out as well,' he said; 'as Mirry-Ann Gawne and I have no social position to consider, it is scarcely worth your while to worry over my attentions to her. Your brother, I am sure, will not be so selfish as to give rise to any unpleasant gossip in the village about the girl; besides, Mirry-Ann is not likely to have her head turned.'

'You don't know her story, perhaps. What's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh. Her mother's head was easily turned, so they say.'

'We will not discuss the subject any more, Miss Christian; I do know her sad story, and I know too that you are far too generous and true a woman in your heart to remember it against her. You do yourself an injustice by your cruel speech. If she is born with gentle blood in her veins, and a stain upon her fair name, it is surely all the harder for her to live the life she leads.'

Grace was mollified for a moment and her angry eyes dropped.

'Perhaps I have been a beast,' she said, 'but there's nothing else to do.' She managed to imply that if he wouldn't flirt they must fight. 'When I'm bored to death as I have been to-day, I always do get cross; I really can't help it. I just long to be hateful to some one, it doesn't matter whom. And I have had this on my mind for some time now; I think my brother is in greater danger than you know; you are so level-headed.'

'Wouldn't being nice to some one do as well?' There was just the suspicion of forgiveness in his voice, and his eyes for the moment were tender. He had intentionally ignored the latter part of her sentence.

'It's a more dangerous way of letting off suppressed energy, isn't it?' she said shyly.

'Perhaps, but it's pleasanter for the other person, don't you think?'

'Well, who shall I begin on?' she asked laughingly, the answer hovering in her eyes.

How full his heart was of another woman Dick Schofield had never known until that moment, for Grace Christian had never been so alluring. Yet, recognising her charm, his heart cried out for Mirry-Ann, and he answered her casually to steel himself against drifting with her mood, for Grace was light of heart and quick of wit, and a man must indeed be master of himself to resist the fascination of a lovely woman doing her best to please him. So he said coldly—

'Be nice to Mrs. Hedges.'

Now Mrs. Hedges was Grace's *bête noire*, so they both laughed naturally and this relieved the situation.

'I'll come and eat the raspberries with the cream,' she said, 'after you've picked them, and you'll be nice to *me* instead. You've been odious enough for one morning, try and make up for it in the afternoon. You look so like a cross governess when you scold, don't do it, and I'll promise to be good.'

There was always so much banter and chaff when Grace was in a gay mood, that Dick Schofield never took anything she said very seriously, so with a laugh and a promise to be good to her in the afternoon, he said good-bye.

CHAPTER V

IN the afternoon when the raspberries were picked, and all carefully hulled and laid in sugar for preserving, Grace Christian, conscious of having behaved herself remarkably well, asked Dick Schofield to take her up to the Colby Ponds, which were on the Ballaugh estate, and teach her how to cast a fly. He had annoyed her once by calling her a poacher because so far she had only fished with worms. To get to the Old Ponds they had to pass through the village and turn off the high-way about a mile along the road. Mrs. Hedges watched them go off together, and the match-making instinct which lies at the bottom of every woman's heart, was kindled. 'Such a handsome couple,' she said to herself, 'but the girl's a desperate flirt, I hope she won't play with him. What a dear fellow he is!' She little knew that the girl had long been playing a losing game, and was now so heavily involved that she could not draw back.

The handsome young couple had walked some way through the village in silence, when Dick Schofield stopped suddenly and said: 'Wait here

a moment, if you don't mind; I've a message from Mrs. Hedges for John William Kenean's wife.' They stopped in front of the cottage and Dick Schofield knocked on the door with his stick.

'Are you in, Mrs. Kenean?' he asked, and a soft voice answered quickly—

'Hush, please, Mrs. Kenean's asleep.'

The voice sent the blood rushing through the young man's veins and dyed his face a deep crimson. He stepped softly into the cottage kitchen and Grace Christian waited outside with war in her heart.

'You here, Mirry?'—'Is Albert Victor ill?' The way he spoke the girl's name was in itself an endearment, there was a ring of quiet possession in it which was not lost upon Grace's listening ears.

'Yes, poor little mite, he's dying, I'm afraid, and his mother doesn't know it. He's had two bad fits to-day. It has been so terrible to watch his baby suffering.'

The girl's voice was tired, and her face pale with anxiety. A great longing came to Dick Schofield for the lover's right to comfort her with gentle caresses. But he remembered that Grace Christian was standing at the door, and said as he looked down at the little child on her knee, 'Poor wee chap, how dreadfully ill he looks!' The little hand like a bird's claw found its way into his. 'What's the matter

with his mother? why has she left you all alone with the child?'

'Her husband almost killed her last night, the neighbours heard her cry for help and sent for——.' She paused.

'They sent for you, of course. My poor Mirry, you are the good angel of the village.' He bent towards her for a moment, silently kissing her hair and fondling the hand which was clasped round the child's shoulders, with a look in his eyes which made the girl feel all the more tender toward the frail little life which was passing away on her knee. 'What a pitiful little object!' he said.

'Yes,' she whispered, her voice trembling with emotion and grief. At the moment she would like to have laid her head on his shoulder, for she was physically worn out as well as sick at heart. 'A drunkard's child. So much kinder of the Master to take him, if only the poor mother could understand. But she's cried herself to sleep in there,' and she pointed to a bed in a recess in the wall where the mother lay worn out with bodily fatigue and suffering.

'My darling, you look so tired. What can I do for you. I hate to leave you like this,—may I stay?'

'Oh no, please go, there is nothing you can do; but you've forgotten—you said Mrs. Hedges had asked you to call?'

'It was only to tell the mother that there is plenty

of milk up at the farm for the baby if she wanted any, and fresh eggs too, but I 'm afraid Albert Victor won't want any more, poor wee chap.'

Dick Schofield was standing behind Mirry-Ann's chair: he had seen Grace's shadow move from the door some minutes before. With a hand laid on each of the girl's soft cheeks, he pulled her face gently back, and pressed a lingering kiss on her burning lips. For a moment she did not speak; then broken and shaken with emotion she implored him to leave her.

'If you only knew how little I can bear it, you would have pity, and not try me so hard.'

Her ear caught the sound of Grace's footsteps.

'Oh, please go,' she said, in tones of such evident distress and nervousness at his presence that he turned to leave her.

A knock came to the door.

'Are you *ever* coming? I'm getting tired of waiting.' The voice was coldly imperious. Mirry-Ann turned her tired eyes to the door where Grace Christian stood, a dainty figure in white, her sailor hat just correctly balanced on her coil of shining hair, and one brown boot already across the threshold. She drew back when she saw Mirry-Ann Gawne with the dying child in her lap.

'I beg your pardon,' she said coldly; 'I thought Mr. Schofield had brought a message to *Mrs. Kenean*; is she not here?' Without waiting for an answer she

went on: 'Is the child ill? can I send you anything from Ballaugh?'

'No, thank you,' Mirry-Ann said, with more dignity and less irritation in her voice than Miss Christian had shown. 'Mrs. Hedges has been most thoughtful, the child has had everything it could want.'

Grace was annoyed. It was her place, not Mrs. Hedges', to play Lady Bountiful in the village. 'Then, are you ready?' she asked, turning to Dick Schofield. 'Oh, by the way,' she said to Mirry-Ann as she left the cottage, 'I have some more plain sewing for you whenever you have finished what you have on hand.'

Mirry-Ann was always ready to cry, she could never keep back the tears that filled her blue eyes the moment her heart was bruised, and Miss Christian had intended that her words should bruise. The little child on her lap turned his weary eyes up to hers, when two hot tears dropped on his sickly little face.

'Poor little mite,' she whispered, as she pressed him closely to her, 'poor little mite, at least you can lie in some one's arms and be loved and caressed. You don't know what it is to have a hunger tearing at your heart, and to know that it can never be satisfied. Oh, baby! just to feel that it was right to let him love me, and to let him know that I love him as only a woman, who has been deprived of love all her life, can love. Just to tell him that, although I am only Ned Gawne's girl, his love is all the world to me.

Dick fills my heart all day, and yet I have never once called him Dick. But Love doesn't need any name, for he's always here,' and she pressed the child to her heart. 'Always the one thing of which I am wholly conscious. Ah, why am I not as conscious of the presence of Christ? for that is what He asks for. Why does He not fill my heart, the dear Lord Jesus who is waiting to make your frail sick body beautiful? Oh, baby, if He would only come down for you while I am here, just to let me see Him—for once, and touch my hand for a moment, yes, and love me as I want to be loved to help me through life's journey. Have I strength to resist this human love and sympathy which is offered me, and to trust only to His mercy and loving-kindness? Sometimes it seems so far off, but that is because I have driven out His presence by an earthly love.'

Her reverent and devotional nature was awakening to the fact that imperfect human love does more for human nature, for joy or for sorrow, than a lifetime of spiritual intercourse with the Unseen. For the human heart is dependent on human love for a complete existence. Even Saint Catherine, Mirry-Ann's model of womanly virtue and saintly piety, did not remain single at heart. To heal the aching void, aching for a woman's full existence, she comforted herself with the belief in her spiritual union with the Lord, and she received His personal manifestations to sustain her love.

But to return to Dick Schofield and his frivolous companion. Teaching a girl how to cast a fly somewhat resembles teaching a man how to tie an evening neck-tie. To do the thing correctly, you should put your arm round his neck and stand behind him.

Grace Christian stood in front of her teacher by the edge of the still ponds, a charming picture of unconscious submission. Her pretty head was so close to his that it might have been a mere accident if their lips had met, a quick turn of the girl's head, and the unresisted impulse of an ordinary human man. The old ponds were hidden deep in a copse of brushwood in the private preserves of Ballaugh, a delightful spot to idle away a summer afternoon.

They had left Mrs. Kenean's cottage in silence, and certainly the first part of the fishing expedition was not so enjoyable as Grace had anticipated, for her companion's thoughts were very unguardedly still taken up with the scene in the little cottage which they had just left. But it was only natural, as the hours passed, that the magnetic vitality and glowing beauty of the girl at his side should affect the young man, who, like most young men, had no morbid fancy for dwelling on unpleasant topics in silence.

'Let us sit down,' she said, when she found he was not in a talkative mood, 'walking is so often conducive to silence.' She flung herself down gracefully and rested her back against the stump of a fallen tree, which was soft with a covering of moss and ivy.

'You may sit on my skirt,' she went on, with a pretty air of condescension and with mischief-provoking eyes, and she pulled out the full length of her white dress to make a carpet for the young man to sit upon.

'Shan't I crush it?' he said, but her eyes waited for him to sit down, which he did, at a conscious distance from her, and waited for her to speak. In his heart there was anger for her scornful treatment of Mirry-Ann, but no man could be wholly angry with a woman so good to look upon. Grace was the incarnation of proud beauty.

She held out her pretty hand: 'Look,' she cried, 'at the raspberry pricks! It might be nettle-rash.'

'Poor little hands,' he answered, keeping his own sufficiently busy by stripping the seeds from a blade of grass. The girl was so inviting, and human nature is so quick to assert itself when youth is off its guard. 'They are quite business-like.'

'They look horrid,' she said; 'I hate to see a woman's hands look so hard-worked.'

'Do you,' he said, trying not to see the two white hands spread out for his inspection; 'I rather like it in a way, if the hands are well kept and nicely shaped. I like to think a woman's hands can do something.'

'Surely hands that can do something and look as if they couldn't are much nicer? The unexpected is always so much more interesting.'

'Is that possible?' he asked. 'Almost everything we do bears its reflection; the reflection of a busy life is not distasteful to me. I've little in common with drones.'

Grace made a little grimace. 'Mrs. Hedges, for instance, sometimes suggests a hen-wife, or a potato-peeler,—do you like that?'

'Dear soul, yes,' he said. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hedges' hard-worked hands were not the illustration in point in his mind's eye. 'Really, Miss Christian, you are too hard on her, just because she is not good-looking and a little over-practical. But even you would have admired the way she received the Attorney-General and his wife yesterday, when they came to call. They found her working like any man, picking out seed potatoes, in a big mushroom hat and a sack pinned round her for an apron. She wasn't the least put out, and entertained them with that charming dignity which seems the special inheritance of an Irishwoman.'

Grace frowned. 'She's so frowsy, I can't stand her. Now, she is what Frank calls a mere female. I thought most men liked women.'

Her eyes were following the antics of two kingfishers darting across the water in chase of flies. Two thrushes answered each other in song from the trees over-head, two butterflies all white provoked each other in the little shaft of sunlight which found its way through the trees overhanging the pond. In

the silence that followed her words Dick Schofield let his mind answer some questions about the girl by his side—questions which had often before been suggested by her manner towards him. 'If I had flirted with her, as my lady no doubt wished,' he said to himself, 'and had ended by loving her, what would have been the result? A pretended amazement at my doing so, and a very decided refusal to my addresses! For I can't flatter myself that she has any real liking for me, but I 'm the only man in the neighbourhood, and I 've no doubt she thinks it a monstrous thing that I 'm not head-over-ears in love with her. Women want things all their own way, we are to flirt with them, and devote ourselves to them, just up to the point they wish and which pleases their vanity, but no further. They forget the fact that things seldom stand still, they either advance or retire altogether.'

'How charmingly they flirt!' she said. 'Did *you never* flirt?'

The bantering voice broke in on his reverie. She seemed almost to have divined his thoughts, though her words were suggested by the birds and butterflies.

'I don't know,' he said, 'I have never had time to try.'

'Oh, you are always busy doing nothing.' The girl's grey eyes were bright with alluring laughter. He certainly looked idle enough at the moment.

'It takes two to flirt, and two to kiss, and two to fight and make it up again, and there's no one to teach me, you see,' he said, with mock seriousness.

'Shall I try?' she asked; 'it's really not hard to learn, not nearly so difficult as throwing a fly.'

'But I couldn't flirt with *you*,' he said, with mock deference.

'And your reason, sir? Am I not fair enough?'

'Passing fair, madam, and passing rich—for one so humble as I.'

'How absurd—as if you were really humble! I never knew anybody so irritating.'

'Because, madam, I do not presume?'

'The pride that apes humility! We might have had a very amusing summer if it had been any one else but you; I never let things drag into the winter. People get serious in the winter, and I hate that; I only want to be amused.'

'After all,' he said, 'what do you mean by flirting? Perhaps even Mrs. Hedges' nursery-governess might have indulged in it if it was quite harmless and suitable for a young person in that position?'

'Speaking by the dictionary, flirting is to simulate a feeling you do *not* entertain, but it is really to entertain your feelings with actions you do not simulate.'

The young man laughed. 'To simulate means to make believe, doesn't it?'

'Yes,' she said, 'but don't you see, that is why the

definition is wrong, for the feeling sometimes gets to be quite real.'

'That is where the fun comes in, I suppose, for

> "No game was ever yet worth a rap
> For a rational man to play,
> Into which no accident, no mishap,
> Could possibly find its way."'

Grace laughed a little scornfully. 'You're afraid of the danger, apparently, but with experienced flirts there really isn't any; if people are clumsy they must expect to suffer. And now we must go home, for we can't sit here all the evening.'

As they went homeward through the village, they met the young chapel folk hurrying to the choir practice for their anniversary service. The Anniversary, which was usually held out of doors, was the great chapel event of the year; it was even more popular than the Tea-Meeting Festival which took place in the winter, and was of a more social order, although it took place in the chapel itself.

John Thomas Costain was in the leading-strings of a rosy-faced, buxom girl, whose bright blue eyes shone with an air of proud possession, for all the village knew that to walk to and from the chapel with a girl meant that the man was courting her; a girl would often give a man up if he were seen walking with another girl. It was Emily Corrin, the under-housemaid at Ballaugh. She bowed respectfully to Miss Christian, and John Thomas saluted with the usual 'Good-evening, ma'am.'

'Oh fancy, John Thomas has got a new girl,' Grace said; 'he didn't look very cheerful over it, did he?'

Dick Schofield laughed. 'John Thomas is more than British, he's Manx. He takes his pleasures doubly sadly. When they're off duty what a solemn psalm-singing set they are! They seem to me to go to chapel every night, and practise their parts, as they call it, all day long.'

'John Thomas can look happier than that,' Grace said quickly. 'Now if he had been walking out with pretty Mirry-Ann, the expression on their faces would have been reversed. He then looks the proud possessor, and she, well—she tries to look like an early Christian martyr; it's very foolish of her, for John Thomas is really a very good catch, he's quite well off, you know, and ought to hold a much better position in the village than he does, but he's very ignorant and lazy, I fancy.'

At the sound of running footsteps, Grace turned. 'Why,' and she laughed, a natural and not unpleasant laugh, 'here comes Mirry-Ann herself, running after them. She *is* a woman after all; perhaps it was the young man's dodge; he's not so ignorant, at least where women are concerned!'

Mirry-Ann Gawne, her face pale and stained with weeping, was about to pass them, when Dick Schofield stopped her.

'How's little Albert Victor now?' he asked;

'I'm coming down this evening to sit with John William, to try and keep him from drinking.'

'The child is dead,' she said, pausing to get breath. 'Another fit came on after you had left, and he died in it. The father's home now, and horribly drunk. I can't manage him, I must get some one to help me. I am going to ask John Thomas Costain.'

Scarcely remembering Grace Christian, Dick Schofield hurried after her.

'I'll come, Mirry. John William and I are good friends when he's sober. I've spent a lot of time sea-fishing with him, perhaps I can manage him now. You'll excuse me, I know, Miss Christian,' he said, turning abruptly back to the girl, whose face was expressive of pained horror.

'Oh certainly, go,' she said, 'if Mirry-Ann wants you.'

When they reached the cottage Mirry-Ann suggested that she should go in first, for they could hear no voices or any sound of disturbance. In a moment she came out again and spoke very softly. 'John William's fast asleep, but Mrs. Kenean's awake, she motioned to me not to come in. I think I can leave her now, for all the neighbourhood will be eager to talk to her over the baby's death. They take a morbid pleasure in death, and broken-hearted as she is, the mother will enjoy discussing every detail of his illness.'

They stood together silent for a little time, then

Dick said, 'There is something I want to say to you to-night, something I want you to promise. Will you come, Mirry, for a walk, up to the old Druids' Chapel? it was there I first met you, dearest; will you come?'

The girl shrank back. 'No, no, don't ask me,' she said. 'You know I have never willingly gone anywhere to meet you; when we have met, it has been by chance.'

'Or the ruling of fate, dear,' he said, 'if that will ease that terrible conscience of yours. If you won't go I will ask you here, for, darling, I want the whole village to know that some day you will be my wife. You must promise me to-night, Mirry. Ah, darling, why not just promise that some day—for I can wait, Mirry, I would wait a hundred years—you will marry me?'

They had turned off the public high-road through an open gate into a green meadow. Some of John William's small Manx sheep lifted their black faces, and for a moment ceased their endless nibble; it was not the first time that a lover and his lass had interrupted their evening meal.

Mirry-Ann's face became dyed with radiant crimson as they walked full into the glory of the setting sun. It was a lover's evening, the witching hour, but the girl could not trust herself to speak.

'Sweet Mirry,' he pleaded, with his arm slipped round her waist, 'won't you promise, won't you give me this hope to take away with me, for, dearest,' he

whispered, drawing her a little closer towards him and feeling as he did so how physically weak and unresisting she was though her eyes still held their look of unconquerable will—'dearest, I am soon going away, and I want the assurance of your promise that you will be my wife.'

'Going away,' she said with a little cry, instinctively drawing nearer to him, 'why are you going?' Her last words were scarcely more than a whisper.

'I 'm going to make a home for you, Mirry. It 's so sweet to be here with you, dear, in this lovely little island. It 's so precious to know that you love me, Mirry. It takes a lot of courage to go, but I want something more than your love, darling, I want you yourself, for my very own, and if I stay on at the farm I could never go to your uncle and say, "I can afford to marry your niece, will you give her to me?" Almost any young man in the village has more to offer than I have. I am what he hates most, a gentleman and a beggar.'

'Yes, it is best for you to go,' she said more calmly, 'I am sure it is best.'

He knew by the tone of her voice, that this was one of the moments when she was praying for power to resist.

'It will be best for us both in the end, dear, but I will stay in Colby till I have your promise, for I couldn't go and leave you, Mirry, if you had not

promised. I should torture myself into madness with the fear that your uncle had forced you to marry some young fellow with an acre and a cow. And I believe you would consent to sacrifice your whole life and happiness to what you considered your duty. But there is a duty which we owe to ourselves, dearest Mirry,' he continued, as he saw the strength of resistance still shining in her eyes. 'I never knew a woman who was such a strange mixture of womanly submission and moral determination. Faith can move mountains, but my love cannot move you one inch. Do you really love me, Mirry?' . . . 'Forgive me, dear Mirry, for, thank God, I know you love me, but I am waiting for your promise. We have been drawn together, you and I, by some unseen force; we have been conscious since the day we first met, that something stronger than our own wills has taken our lives into its keeping. If we had never met again, unconsciously we should still have influenced each other, for you are the completion of my being. You love me, dearest, I know, not because I am my poor self, not because I am in any way worthy of your love, not because you have wished to love me, but because in spite of yourself you must submit. Our love was inevitable. Can you deny that, sweetheart?'

Both of her hands were held tight in her lover's and he was eagerly watching her eyes for the first look of complete submission. 'Dearest, you understand?'

'No,' she said sadly, 'it is impossible. It is all too difficult to understand. You say that fate has decreed our love, that we had no power over our hearts, that we drifted to each other because by nature we belonged to each other. To believe in fate like that is to deny God.'

'My darling!'

'Yes,' the girl continued, fighting back the love in her full heart lest it should hasten her will and so pass from her keeping and mingling with his kindle into passion. 'Yes,' she said, 'it is to deny God. He has given us a will power and a sense of right and wrong. If He tempts us now and again to prove our worth, it is a coward's refuge to call it the working of fate. The affection of the will and moral choice should guide our love. I cannot believe that a marriage with you would be right.'

'But why should we fight against our love? is it wrong, is it unholy? May God not be watching and approving?'

'I have always hoped,' the girl said, 'that if ever I loved a man, I should love him for what was best in him. I should wish to be his wife to enjoy the sympathy and companionship of his mind and individuality.' She paused, and she almost whispered—'My love for you has taken no thought or reckoning of all these things. I know that you are worthy of a better love than mine, I know that you are worthy of a woman's highest love; but often I ask myself,

have I given you my highest love? Oh,' she cried, 'I have kept no watch over myself, I have let myself love like the creatures that have nothing higher than instinct to guide them. Religion is nothing to you, yet I would marry you, and in so doing break my uncle's heart.'

'Why do you speak of our love like this, Mirry? My reverence for you is so mingled with my love that they are one.'

'I am so unworthy,' she said; 'I thought I was strong, and I am so weak, so weak that I loved you without the poorest reason to guide me. I loved you as I have always prayed that I should never love any man. What can be high or pure in a love that goes against one's reason, and one's sense of right and wrong. Such love as ours can only bring unhappiness. It has begun by deception.'

'I would have it open, Mirry, I would have the whole world know that the dearest, and purest, and loveliest woman has promised one day to be my wife.'

'If I promised,' she said, disengaging herself from his attempt to draw her to him again, 'I must deceive my uncle, for he would never believe that a man of your birth and position meant to marry me.' With the thought of her uncle's wrath and his hatred of the upper classes, her longing for the gentleness of her lover's caresses almost broke down her reserve. 'In his lifetime,' she went on, 'I can never marry you.

I will never repay his love and kindness by breaking his heart again. I must atone for my mother's deed. If I marry I must marry one of her people. Besides,' she said wearily, with all hope gone out of her voice, 'there is your life to consider. I love you too dearly to ruin it. Yes, it would be ruin,' she said, not pausing to listen to his protest. 'Friends and relations, one's earliest life's ties, should not be easily cast off. My marriage with you would do this, you know the story of my birth—no, no, you must see that our love is a thing to be conquered and put aside. If you leave here and take up some profession which interests you, it will be easier to forget. It is easier for men to forget.'

'If I go away, Mirry, it will only be to make a home for you. I will come back and claim you when you have only your own happiness to consider; the old man cannot live long.'

'Oh, hush,' she said, 'he is all I have. How can I ever repay him or love him enough? Oh, you don't know,' she said earnestly, 'how hard he has tried to be both mother and father to me; he is getting old now, and exacting.'

'Forgive me, dearest, but it is his foolish prejudices that keep us apart.'

'No,' Mirry-Ann said, 'it is not only that. God give me strength to resist you if he were gone.'

'Dear one,' he said, 'your humble birth and lowly life only make you the more saintly in my eyes.

I have no money and no position to offer you, or to lose.'

They had come out through the meadow at the end of the village near Ned Gawne's cottage. The old man was standing waiting for the girl at the open door, wrapped up in a warm shawl. When they drew near, Dick Schofield noticed the unpleasant expression in his eyes and his threatening look at the girl.

'Good-evening, Ned, how's the rheumatism?' he asked, trying to speak naturally.

'Middlin', middlin', sir,' he answered gruffly. 'Hast thou bane to the choir-practice, Mirry-Ann?'

'No, dad, John William Kenean's little one's just died, and I was over helping the mother.'

'I'm thinkin' thou'lt be the village busy-body soon, Mirry-Ann. Thou'rt that ready with thy helpin'.—Wass there anythin' *you* would be wantin', sir?' he asked suddenly of Dick, in a hard cold voice.

'Only a little civility, dad,' the girl said coaxingly. 'Mr. Schofield very kindly helped me——'

'It's mortal kind ye are, sir,' he said, interrupting the girl's gracious speech, 'to be helpin' Mirry-Ann, but I'm thinkin' she's got a young man of her own that might coom in handy for a job like that, and it's mighty vexed he'll be, I'm thinkin', if he's bane robbed of his desarts. John Thomas Costain's courtin' the girl, sir, and I'll be tellin' ye he's dreadful jealous —'deed, but that's true, Mirry-Ann!'

'No, dad, it 's not true; don't believe him, Mr. Schofield.' The girl's eyes were burning with shame and indignation. 'You know, dad, I 've told you it wasn't true a hundred times.'

'My Gough, that 's only to tase yer ould dad, chile, it 's like yer mawther y' are.' The words were meant to convey good humour, but the tone of his voice was grating.

'I hope he will forgive me; I only went with your niece to see if I could make John William Kenean behave himself.'

'John Thomas would have been a dale more suited to the job, Mirry-Ann. Thou 'rt makin' too free with thy betters axin' them to help thee with a drunken baste.'

Dick Schofield took out his tobacco-pouch and handed it to the old man, who filled his pipe greedily and lit it, making a grand sucking sound while it drew. In a few minutes his angry eyes softened under the genial influence of a full pipe of tobacco. As often as not he would sit over an empty fireplace drawing hard at an empty pipe. Mirry-Ann supposed he derived the same pleasure as a child does from an empty bottle. The old man was almost in his second childhood.

'Take a sate, sir,' he said, 'it 's as chape to sit as to stan'.'

Dick Schofield dropped into John Thomas's accustomed chair opposite the Bible press, and

the old man smoked his pipe in silence. The young man wondered what thoughts were filling his mind; he certainly would never have guessed, for Ned Gawne suddenly said, apropos of nothing that was in his own thoughts, 'Mrs. Hedges be a mortal smart wom-an, sir—'deed, but she 's mortal smart, though!'

'Yes,' Dick answered with an amused smile—smart was hardly the term Miss Christian would have applied to her, but 'smart' had a different meaning in old Ned's vocabulary.—'she 's as able as any man.'

'A powerful sight abler, sir. 'Deed, but it isn't every young fellow as can make a bit of lan' pay in these bad times. All the young fellows is lavin' the ould country, times is that bad, sir.'

'What will the girls do?—they are dull enough when the men are at the fishing.'

'They 'll be goin' after them, sir, I reckon, for the gels can't do without them at all. But Mrs. Hedges is a mortal smart wom-an, 'deed but she is though. Powerful smart; I wass joost sayin' that to Mirry-Ann this very day, sir.'

There was silence again for a few minutes; the cat purred, all unmindful of its tailless existence, never missing what it never had, and blissfully ignorant of the fact that a cat's tail is supposed to denote the way the wind blows in its own affairs. The old man squinted down into the full bowl of his long pipe.

'I wass hearin' that Mrs. Hedges wass killin' a pig up at the farm, sir.'

'Yes,' Dick Schofield replied, the trend of the old man's thoughts suddenly dawning upon him. 'I spoke to the pig-sticker last night.'

''Deed, but Mrs. Hedges breeds tremenjous fat pigs, sir?'

'Yes, this one's a beauty, it's been entirely hand-fed. I'm quite sorry to part with it. I shall keep my head well under the bed-clothes to-morrow morning.' He looked at Mirry-Ann quietly knitting, as he spoke.

'That's the worst part of stock-farming,' she said, 'you're always rearing and nursing things only to kill them in the end.'

'Mirry-Ann, hould thy tongue; thy falin's are as saf', thou'lt be a mortal poor wife for a man, I'm thinkin'.—It's joost her way, sir,' speaking with an air of apology to the young man, 'she'll be refusin' to ate the chickens she's reared from the eggs herself joost for the very purpose of atein' them and nothin' else. But she'll take a sight of trouble, sir, to mind them when they're li'l things, feedin' them from her han' and callin' them all by name joost as tender as a mawther with a lap full of childer. Then when they're fit and ready for fillin' her, she'll be sayin', "Dad, I can't touch it"; Mirry-Ann's that saf', sir, I've seen her cry when a young pullet's been catched for killin'. Don' let John Thomas know it,

Mirry-Ann, for a young fellow likes his wife to be enjoyin' a comfortable bit of dinner with him, leastways at first, sir.'

'Gives his wife the breast the first year, the liver wing the next, a leg the third, and the trunk when they've been married some years,' said Dick, trying to take lightly, for Mirry-Ann's sake, her uncle's reference to John Thomas.

The old man chuckled at Dick's poor attempt at wit,

''Deed, but it's joost what yer sayin', sir, a saf' wom-an soon gets the nonsense drove out of her when her family comes. Now, Mrs. Hedges'll have too good sense at her to have saf' falin's like that. I wass joost thinkin', sir, there will be a dale of waste comin' off that pig. You'll not be atein' the "insides" nor all the fat up at the farm at all; there'll be a dale of waste, sir.'

'Mrs. Hedges never wastes, Ned, she's far too good a housekeeper for that.'

'She's a mortal smart wom-an, Mrs. Hedges, but if there wass a bit of fat goin' waste, sir, it's a fine thing for the rheumatics, isn't that so, Mirry-Ann?'

Mirry-Ann did not answer, but, with a look of shame for her uncle's exhibition of native greed, bowed her head.

'I'm thinkin' that gentry won't be atein' insides, Mirry-Ann, and a little bit of fat would be a rale comfort, it would save yer elbow grease.'

Dick Schofield tried to laugh, but the girl's eyes forbade him.

'I have no doubt,' he said, as he rose to go, 'that Mrs. Hedges will be only too glad to find a good use for some of Black Sally's superfluous fat. I 'll not forget to tell her.'

Mirry-Ann had followed him to the doorstep. 'Please don't ask her,' she said, 'dad forgets himself, he 's getting old.'

'Mirry-Ann,' the old man called out sharply, 'don't be kapin' the young gentleman out there talkin' at all; John Thomas will be comin' soon, I am thinkin'. Coom in and get the books ready for the radin'. Good-night to ye, sir; a li'l bit of pig's fat is a rale comfort, sir.'

'Good-night, Ned; Mrs. Hedges won't forget to send you a bit of Black Sally to comfort your knees.'

The girl's hands were both in her lover's for a moment in the shadow of the cottage doorway. He could see her love for him in her eloquent eyes mingled with her sensitive shrinking from the old man's vulgarity. Surely her lover would see now how far removed she was from him in her real life.

'Mirry-Ann,' the old man called again impatiently, 'art thou never comin'?—standin' talkin' there like a gossip on the doorstep. Good-avenin', sir, good-avenin'; I wass thinkin' if Mrs. Hedges had a li'l bit

of saf' flannin' and pig's grease for asin' the rheumatics. Mirry-Ann,' and his voice rose to a shrill cry, 'I can see John Thomas.'

'Go,' the girl said, and she pulled her hands from her lover's lips, he was caressing them with silent kisses, 'Go,' she whispered, 'I told you that I must deceive him if I loved you.'

When he left the cottage he walked quickly through the village in order to reach the farm in time for the evening meal. The width of the village street was spanned with bands of young men and girls walking arm-in-arm, singing hymns. John Thomas Costain with Emily Corrin still on his arm was amongst the leaders; he had a full baritone voice, and gloried in showing it off to its limit.

John Thomas was never really so happy as when 'taking a part,' as he termed it, in a soul-stirring hymn. Indeed, there was no form of amusement you could offer these simple people that achieved half the popularity of a prayer-meeting or a choir practice.

When he first came to the village, Dick Schofield had tried to start a cricket team, and with the Squire and his sister's help had opened a reading-room for the men, where a fair number of papers, second-hand from Ballaugh and the Farm, were supplied free. There was also a fair bagatelle-board, backgammon, and draughts. But the effort was not appreciated, so the Club had fallen through. From

the first it had been received ungraciously, and with but ill-disguised scorn.

Music and prayers were the limit of their recreations. But music they considered a gift bestowed upon men to praise the perfections of Jehovah, not for the destruction—by pleasure—of the human soul. It is extremely doubtful if any one of them had ever been inside an opera-house, or seen a theatrical performance, but the younger ones had heard of such things, and read descriptions of them in illustrated papers, and had also been taught by their minister on circuit from Liverpool that operatic music breathed sensual and subtle poison into the human heart.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. HEDGES seemed a little put out, and for once thoughtful, as she and Dick Schofield sat at their evening meal. As a rule, she had more to say than there was time to say it all in. Noting her distraction, he asked what was troubling her.

'Oh, nothing,' she answered—'only the eyes of an old starving woman I saw to-day.'

'The eyes of a woman who is starving! where did you see her?'

'At the farm,' said Mrs. Hedges a little wearily, 'she was found in a state of exhaustion just outside the farm gate; she was the poorest-looking thing you ever saw, and the saddest.'

'What did you do with her? Was she begging—I hope you weren't frightened?'

Mrs. Hedges laughed. 'Afraid, my dear boy! if you had only seen her. How could I be afraid of a poor starving woman who couldn't even remember her own name?'

'Forgive me, but women are proverbially afraid of beggars and mice, whereas they will often face

a burglar. What was she doing at the farm? we don't get tramps in our part of the world.'

'That's what I couldn't find out, and she couldn't tell me herself. She spoke quite sensibly, though in a state of extreme exhaustion, until I questioned her where she had come from, then she lost her head and couldn't remember anything. She doesn't know who she is any more than I do.'

'Where is she now?'

'I'm sure I don't know. I offered her a bed in the barn and what do you think she said?—"I would rather sleep in hedge-side than accept charity when I ought by rights to be sleeping down there," and she pointed to Ballaugh.'

'Then she wasn't begging?'

'Oh dear no, I thought she was, but she refused all offer of food or money. I wish I could forget her before I go to bed, her wild eyes haunt me. She was exactly like some poor wandering spirit returned to earth in search of some one, or something. It is a case of total collapse of memory.'

Mrs. Hedges usually resorted to something practical when her mind had had time to dwell upon unpleasant topics. So when supper was finished she took up the tall brass candlestick and went hurriedly off to take a last look at her sleeping family before she herself retired for the night. Fortunately, too, there were a few last words to be said to the cook on the subject of a warm bath for

Sally's corpse in the morning, before it was shaved and prepared for cutting up.

She had no tender feelings like Mirry-Ann Gawne on the subject of its death. A pig in Mrs. Hedges' practical eyes was merely a few hams in a state of incompletion, and she would in all probability superintend the process of their evolution until they reached the haven of shelter under the kitchen roof.

About an hour later Dick Schofield suddenly remembered old Ned Gawne's request for a bit of flannin' and pig's grease to comfort his aching knees, and went in search of Mrs. Hedges, whom he found in one of the children's rooms. She was bending over her youngest son, whose cheeks were flushed with crying and his eyes wide with fear.

'Only dreaming,' Mrs. Hedges said when she saw Dick standing near her with inquiring eyes. 'Quite big boys are such infants at night. What cowards the dark makes of us all!'

'Is he vexed with the lordship of dreams?' the young man asked, quoting Kendall's fine lines a trifle incorrectly.

'Yes,' she said, 'poor wee fellow, he's dreaming of the old tramp. It appears it was Tim who first noticed her; she told him she was looking for a little child with blue eyes, just like his, and now he's dreamt that the old woman has carried him off.'

When Tim saw Dick Schofield he literally sprang into his arms and refused to go back into his cot.

'The old woman's got big eyes just like saucers,' he cried. 'She is under the bed hiding 'cause you're here.'

'Hush, Tim darling, God takes care of little boys in the dark.' The old cant saying came handy to the mother's lips although darkness was this strong woman's one weak point. Often at night she would lie awake for hours panting like a frightened hare, feeling the very presence of darkness enclosing her in its mysterious embrace.

'Don't want God to take care of Tim. God doesn't take good care, God isn't comfie, God can take care of the old tramp under the bed with big eyes. Mr. Schofield can take care of Tim.'

There was no resisting Irish Tim's blue eyes at night, when he was a trusting little child. In the day-time he ruled the house with the grand air of a trumpet-major. So the 'nursery-governess' carried him off to sleep in his little den which did duty for a smoking room as well as a bedroom.

'I came to tell you, Mrs. Hedges,' he said, 'that old Ned Gawne wants some fat from Black Sally, and a bit of flannin'. "It's tremenjous comfortin' to the rheumatics"—and Albert Victor Kenean won't require any more eggs or milk.'

'Why not?'

'"'Cause he's been took."'

Mrs. Hedges laughed. 'Don't be horrid, you irreverent boy. Poor little mite!'

'I'm not horrid, that is just the way his mother expressed it. She said that "even li'l fella' as he wass he were ready to be took." When I said I hoped so, she said, "He wass, Mr. Schofield, for he hadn't a smile on his face these last six weeks."'

'Six weeks of baby suffering isn't exactly conducive to smiling,' said Mrs. Hedges, 'but some mothers find it difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' answered the young man as he carried off Tim in his arms. His thoughts had flown to the girl who had nursed the dying child on her knee. Love has a curiously softening influence, even on the modern young man, for, as he thought of Mirry-Ann, the young tutor kissed little Tim and held him close in his strong arms until the child was soothed and brave once more. Tim was a dear little thing to love.

CHAPTER VII

IN the village down below, where the lads with their lasses had long since sung their last hymn, and lovers had kissed each other good-night, not so softly as surely, the long street was in summer darkness. The wonderful stillness of nature, which would have filled a city dweller with profound awe, lent the village a sacred beauty. The stars alone seemed to be awake, keeping watch over the little white village nesting under the shelter of the mountain. A solitary traveller passing on his way through the village at this hour, would have felt the same reverence for Sleep as for her twin-sister, Death, in God's silent acre. The dignity of silence would have hushed his steps.

Suddenly, in this conscious stillness, Mirry-Ann was disturbed at her prayers by a gentle lifting of the door-latch. She had gone to bed later than usual, having spent more time than Mrs. Hedges would deem profitable in thinking over the events of the day.

She rose quickly from her knees and went to the door. It might be that some one had sent for her

from the cottage where little Albert Victor lay, stiff and rigid, with no angel-smile on his little discoloured face—a sure sign, his mother thought, that he was ready to join the angel band.

There was no light in the cottage, and the girl, slim and tall, in her white nightgown, looked, as she stood at the door, like an angel of pity bound on some mission of charity through the village.

She pushed the door open and called softly: 'Who's there?' So complete was the night's silence that she felt afraid to raise her voice.

There was no answer, the stillness was unbroken; she scanned the white street up and down, but no figure was in sight. The cool night air blew about her bare feet, but it brought with it no sound or sense of human presence. She was alone with the stars in the sweet summer darkness. There was a movement in the tall fuchsia bush where the bees had ceased their busy droning. Mirry-Ann held her breath, and then asked again: 'Is any one there?' But it was only the night-wind swaying the rosemary branches, lending their fragrance to the stars.

'Rosemary for remembrance,' she said; 'is there anything to help me to forget?' She shut the cottage door and went back to her prayers.

But in a few moments the gentle lifting of the latch was heard again, and Mirry-Ann, with a mind full of spiritual devotion, knelt, half-expectant that some heavenly spirit was about to enter the cottage.

With bated breath she remained on her knees, and this time the latch was lifted more firmly, and the door was pushed gently open. Still Mirry-Ann knelt as if in prayer, half-afraid of the spiritual presence which she felt certain was near her, half-filled with exultant emotion — but instead of some beautiful apparition, an old feeble woman, tottering from exhaustion, stole into the cottage kitchen.

Mirry-Ann got up from her knees, and struck a light in order to see her strange visitor more clearly. The mad blue eyes of the trembling woman stared at the girl vacantly and in wonder. Apparently she was familiar with the kitchen, for she looked round timidly for old Ned's arm-chair, and, finding it, sank into it wearily. Her eyes were still sadly gazing at Mirry-Ann as if her poor wandering brain had mistaken the girl in her white gown for an angel. The candle-light, it is true, did play strange tricks with the unbound hair, and the girl's eyes were like doves'.

'What do you want?' she asked, bending over the old woman. 'Are you seeking a night's rest?' She had to strain her ears to hear the trembling answer—

'I never rest and I never sleep; I am looking for my little child.'

'A little child lost at this time of night?' Mirry-Ann echoed in alarm. 'The poor little thing, it will be so afraid; where have you come from?'

The big blue eyes, like saucers, which at that very moment were frightening little Tim in his sleep, looked all round the cottage helplessly, and then dropped beneath the steady gaze of the girl by her side.

'I don't know,' she said; 'am I here now?' Her eyes looked madder than ever.

'Yes, you are here—in a cottage—safe for the night,' Mirry-Ann answered pityingly. 'I will give you a bed.'

'He told me to go to the devil,' the woman said, 'but my little child wouldn't let me. The little child was stronger than the devil.'

The tramp looked at her with a queer puzzled fear in her eyes.

'Angels don't like the devil's way, do they? But I didn't go, no, I didn't go. Always when I was near going it was the little child that kept me back.'

'Will you have something to eat?' said Mirry-Ann, beginning to be a little afraid of the woman's wild words.

'I never eat,' she said, 'and I never sleep. I'm only looking for my little child.' She made a feeble attempt to rise out of the big arm-chair.

'Perhaps I can help you to find your child, if you will try and think how you lost it.'

'Angels don't bring back little children when they are lost,' the woman said sadly; 'they come to take them away.'

'But I 'm not an angel,' Mirry-Ann said, a quiet sob rising to her throat. It was strange that the two women had thought each other supernatural. 'I 'm only a weak woman like yourself.'

'Not like me, not like me,' and the tramp's slim fingers stroked the threadbare dress she wore. 'But once I was like you,' she said, as if it were impossible for the girl at her side to believe it. 'Once I was like you; pure women look like angels sometimes, before they know the devil.'

'Before you knew the devil,' Mirry-Ann said, trying to follow the woman's mad wandering—'what was your name?'

'I never had a name,' she answered directly, with almost childish glibness.

'Oh yes, you had; can't you remember it? every one has a name. What did your father and mother call you? do you remember where they lived?'

'I never had a father or a mother.'

'Who was your husband—has he got your little child?'

'No, no,' she said with a wild fear in her vacant eyes, 'I never had a husband, I lived with the devil. I wouldn't let my little child stay with the devil. What 's your name; do angels have names?'

'My name is Mirry-Ann Gawne,' the girl said simply. 'I lost my mother when I was a little child.'

A fit of trembling, as if from bodily fatigue, came over the woman, she rocked herself to and fro

moaning to herself, 'Mirry-Ann Gawne, Mirry-Ann Gawne, I 'm looking for my little child.'

While Mirry-Ann had been speaking to the woman she had been quickly preparing a bed on the floor, and with a little gentle persuasion she made her lie down.

Some four or five hours later, at earliest dawn, the door-latch was carefully lifted again, but the stealthy movement of the tottering figure did not wake the girl from her sound sleep. She stirred for a moment as if some dream had disturbed her, and her hand travelled, heavy with the languor of sleep, to brush off a dream kiss from her forehead; then her sleep became as sound again and her face as pure and untroubled as a child's.

Summer nights are short in the island, and the weary wanderer was away with the dawn to look for her little child. When she opened the door on to the street a breath of sweet lavender and rosemary swept the cottage like a perfumed cloud, hovering over Mirry-Ann in her sleep. It affected her, for she dreamed she heard her lover say, 'Rosemary for remembrance.'

When Mirry-Ann awoke the summer sun was streaming into the room through the yellow calceolarias in the window. The empty bed on the floor suddenly recalled her strange visitor of the past night. She looked round the room in wonder, but there was no trace of the old woman now. She had slipped

away, leaving no sign of her mysterious visit but the blankets and pillows spread upon the floor.

The girl stood for a moment gathering her thoughts from the dreamland of the night to the practical world of the day.

'If I couldn't touch the very bed she has lain in, it might all have been a dream,' she said, as she dressed quickly and hurried up the village street in search of her phantom guest. But already the every-day life of the village had begun, and there was no sign of the frail little figure in black.

The every-day noises, and the sound of the children's healthy laughter, with the quacking of ducks and geese devouring their breakfast of strange household scraps thrown to them on the village street, made her feel that her visitor of the night before had surely been but a creation of her own fancy. The poor mad eyes and the trembling figure which had lost the thread of life, and was scarcely aware of its own existence, were not things to meet in broad daylight; such timid eyes could not stand the brilliance of summer sunshine.

In a forced unnatural voice Mirry-Ann asked here and there if any one had seen an old woman, a stranger to the village, passing up the street. When the neighbours questioned her about the woman, Mirry-Ann felt that her visitor had been no imaginary vision, the hysteria of the moment vanished, and she made inquiries in a practical common-sense way.

But a few of the women shook their heads, and said to each other that it was only one of the girl's strange fancies, she wasn't like other people at all, and never had been; she was seeing things that other people couldn't see when she was a li'l bit of a thing. If a tramp had passed through the village she'd have gone to some better house nor ould Ned Gawne's.

By mid-day, however, they had a strange piece of news to tell the girl, and their native curiosity was aroused. The old woman had been found dead in the Arbory churchyard, only a few feet from the grave of Mirry-Ann's grandmother. A coroner's inquest was held, and her death proved to be due to extreme exhaustion.

When Mirry-Ann heard of the woman's death, and how she was to be buried in the first pauper's grave that had ever been dug in the little churchyard, she determined to go up to Ballaugh and ask the Squire to pay for the grave and the funeral expenses. A pauper's funeral seemed to the girl such a bitter ending to the sad life of the poor unknown creature, whose evident refinement and gentle pride seemed such a bitter sarcasm on her destitute condition.

'Some one may love her somewhere,' the girl said. 'Poor soul, she had only lost her way at the end of life's journey.'

Mirry-Ann determined to take Nance Quine's advice on the subject of asking the Squire.

'Yes, why not, child? The Squire's kind-hearted enough, and he's plenty of money and to spare.'

'Yes, Nance, I know he has. I'm sure he would like to do it. We can't have a pauper's funeral in the village, but——' and the girl looked troubled.

'But what, child?'

Mirry-Ann sat down beside the old maid and put her arm round her, speaking in a half whisper.

'I suppose I'm pretty, Nance; I think I must be, and all men are just alike. It doesn't seem to matter who the pretty face belongs to.' She got up suddenly. 'I'd like to prove,' she said, 'if I were quite ugly, and just the same girl as I am now, if even John Thomas Costain would care for me as much?'

Nance Quine's face darkened. 'Chile, don't tell me he's just like his father. I thought the young Squire was different.'

'What was his father like, Nance?'

'Like, chile?' and the old woman's eyes gleamed young again, 'he was like the pictures you see up at Ballaugh of the fine soldiers. He may have been a bold soldier, chile, but he was wantin' in honour with women. He was never content until he had cast a shadow over every pretty face he came across.'

'The young Squire isn't like that, Nance,' Mirry-Ann said quickly; 'I don't know how to explain; he's very polite, and very, very kind,' and the girl paused. 'Oh, Nance, don't you know what I mean; don't you know how it is when life is difficult just

because you are a woman? When I 'm talking to the Squire, I feel, Nance, that if I don't take just the greatest care in the world, he will forget that I 'm only a village girl and say something very foolish. I 've kept him from saying it a hundred times. Some time,' and the girl's voice dropped, 'some time, Nance, perhaps, I *won't* be able to take care.'

There was a little silence, broken only by the old woman's busy knitting-needles.

'Were you always the same wise person when you were young, Nance? Did you ever know what it was to be two or three people all in one, and none of the three on even speaking terms with each other, and all scorning each other's actions? One of these persons, Nance, hasn't the power to be careful with the Squire, and doesn't so much mind the expression she sees in his eyes; but the other person—the person I want to be always, manages to subdue it by her own will. She can take care of both, the man and herself. I wish the Squire would remember, Nance, that I used to curtsey to his mother when he walked through the village with her. I would curtsey to him now, but I 'm too tall. Miss Christian likes all the girls to drop her a curtsey when she passes,' and the girl bobbed low in front of the old maid, and imitated the shrill Manx voice of a little child—'Good-avenin', ma'am.' Her face had assumed a demure, respectful expression, and the old maid laughed. 'Wait a bit, Nance,' she said, 'and I 'll show

you how I 'll bow to the Governor's wife when I 'm presented at Government House.'

She lifted back her dress, and pretended to spread out her invisible train, and, with a pretty dignity, she made a sweeping bow and kissed Nance Quine's hand. It was so seldom that the girl indulged in any form of frivolity that Nance was quite taken aback.

'What 's come to ye, chile? sure yer gettin' merrier as ye get older. When you were a chile ye were as serious as if every day was Sunday.'

'Little children try to be serious over their week days; big people try to play on their Sundays. When we begin life we like to pretend we are men and women; youth has no charm for us; we are all impatience to rush through life's golden days, and take old burdens on our young shoulders.'

'I know well enough what you mean, chile. Plenty of us would like to throw down the burden we were in such a hurry to pick up. But you haven't any trouble up yer sleeve, chile, that you need be smilin' to the village about?'

'Not any trouble, I suppose, Nance'—Mirry-Ann was putting on her bonnet while she spoke—'only some people find life such a simple thing; they just go on from day to day coming into the world, marrying, and going out of it, doing all three things by instinct as it were, while other people are always turning the heel of life, and dropping stitches, and having to go back and pick them up.' Mirry-Ann

took up the long worsted stocking, of rough grey wool, from Nance Quine's knee and held it up to view. 'Look, Nance,' she said, 'this is one person's life,' and the girl ran her fingers down the straight, unshaped leg of the stocking; 'and this difficult part is another's. Do you remember how I used to cry when you taught me to turn the heel? I had to remember so much, and always had to be on guard.'

The stocking dropped back into its place on the older woman's knee. Nance fastened the pins into the bamboo sticks in her belt; something was blinding her eyes so that she had to look carefully before she commenced her knitting. When she she lifted her withered face to speak, the girl had gone, her pretty flowing figure was passing the window. The old maid's hungry eyes followed it lovingly. In some strange unaccountable way the girl always recalled the memory of her own youth and her love.

On reaching the Big House, Mirry-Ann was shown by Emily Corrin into the library. She was not kept waiting many minutes before the Squire appeared. He came forward quickly to the window where the 'young person,' whom he had been told was waiting to see him in the library, was standing.

When he saw that it was Mirry-Ann Gawne he held out his hand in pleased surprise, and the girl put hers, ungloved, regretfully into his.

'What has brought you here, Mirry-Ann?' he asked rather anxiously. The girl had kept out of his way so persistently of late that coming of her own accord to see him aroused his apprehension. 'Are you in trouble?'

She withdrew her hand, which he let go reluctantly, and dropped it at her side:—'No, not in trouble myself, thank you, sir, but I have come to ask a kindness of you.'

'Surely there is no reason to look so uncomfortable about it, Mirry-Ann? Aren't we old, old friends? But you shan't begin to tell me what it is until you sit down.'

'I would rather stand, thank you, sir.' The girl wished to make her visit as brief as possible.

'How unkind when it compels me to do the same! but why not rest while we may? No, not in that stiff-backed chair of my maiden aunt's—here, in this comfortable easy one.' He gently forced her to sit down, and she felt his hands linger as they left hers.

'I came to ask you if you had heard about the death of an old woman who passed through the village two nights ago,' she said abruptly.

'No, I didn't; what about her? Was she a burglar in disguise?'

'Oh no, poor thing! She came to our cottage late at night when all the village were asleep—the most pitiful human thing I have ever seen. She wasn't begging, she had simply lost the thread of her lonely

life, and had drifted she didn't know where. I took her in and gave her a bed.'

Mirry-Ann's eyes were filling with tears at the memory of the old woman's broken spirit and poor mad eyes. 'In the morning, before daylight, she had gone, but later in the day the sexton found her dead in the churchyard.'

'Poor old soul,' Frank Christian said, thinking more of the beauty of the tender woman before him than of the lonely old tramp. 'What can I do to help you?'

'She is to be buried by the parish in a pauper's grave, the first ever dug in our churchyard. I can't bear to think of it. Her people may be looking for her somewhere, for no one knows where she came from; such an end is so dreadful for one who was so gentle and refined. I thought that if I told you about her sad death and explained how very respectable she appeared to be in spite of her exhausted condition, you would be glad to pay for a simple funeral—just because—' the girl went on timidly—'you are kind and rich, and she was a poor, broken-hearted woman who came to your little village to die.'

Mirry-Ann's nervous manner of speaking and the quick rise and fall of her beautiful figure told the Squire more plainly than words how much she disliked the mission upon which she had come.

'I cannot help thinking, sir, that I have been

called upon to look after her; she came to me when I was praying, when the whole village were asleep, and she was found dead by my grandmother's grave. If some one had loved her once, sir——'

The Squire interrupted her, taking her two hands in his. 'Why, Mirry-Ann, little Mirry-Ann, you needn't plead, you know I will do this for you, gladly.'

'I knew you would, sir; I knew I had only to ask. You are so very, very kind.'

'Don't you see how easy it is to be kind, Mirry-Ann, and how nice it is for me to be able to help some one whom I care for very much?'

The girl rose to go.

'What shall you put on her gravestone?' he asked, as an excuse to detain her, but Mirry-Ann was woman enough to take the question seriously, so as to keep the conversation from becoming personal. She thought for a moment.

'We cannot put a name on it, can we, when we don't know who she was? But we could a text—"*I was a stranger and ye took me in.*"'

'That will do very well,' the squire agreed absently.

'I wonder who she was, sir; her eyes haunt me, and so does her voice; it was so sweet and refined.'

'So is yours, Mirry-Ann, I never heard a softer voice. If I was blind, I should choose my wife by her voice.'

The girl blushed and moved to the door.

'No, don't run away just because I said the same thing about your voice as you said about the old lady.'

'My remark was quite impersonal, sir; the old lady was saved the embarrassment of responding.'

'And you think it is safer not to be personal, you and I?'

'It's wiser, sir.'

'But you are so horribly wise, Mirry-Ann. What if I were to throw wisdom to the winds and spoke out all that was in my heart?'

'The thoughts that are in one's heart seldom bear the test of speech.'

'Caution spoils half the joy of living, the gods defy wisdom.'

'I have no fine words to argue, sir; good-bye and thank you.'

'Ah, Mirry-Ann, why can't you stay and talk to me for a little while, just by way of showing your thanks? Why do you always run away from me?'

'What shall we talk about?' the girl asked in distress,—'you and I have nothing in common.'

'People don't consider what they shall talk about, child, when they are pleased to be together.'

'Don't they, sir?—it would be wiser if they did. A cautious talker has less to regret.'

'But wisdom is so dull, Mirry-Ann, and regrets are life's antidotes.'

Suddenly the Squire's face lit up. 'Would you like to go out through the conservatory? We have some fine begonias in flower.' He held the glass door open and Mirry-Ann passed through. She could not resist the temptation, for flowers of any description were a joy to her. The conservatory was carpeted, and here and there, under the shade of some tall plants, was an easy-chair, made of light basket-work. One large Japanese parasol screened the glare from the glass roof. Grace and her brother used this picturesque conservatory as a morning room, for there were no exotics in it demanding a tropical temperature.

The girl's undisguised admiration was very pleasing to the Squire of Ballaugh. He watched her as she stood silently taking in all the beauty and fragrance of her surroundings. 'Do you know, Mirry-Ann,' he said, 'what I should like to do to make this world a really nice sort of world—I 'd let two people like you and me enjoy a few innocent pleasures, and I 'd strike dumb any evil tongue that troubled us. I 'd set you down in that chair and I would take this one, then I 'd light a cigarette—if you didn't mind—and we would let the rest of the world look after itself for the whole livelong day. Surely that is an innocent pleasure enough, only to ask to sit near you in my own conservatory. But there is something very wrong about the construction of life, don't you think so?'

'I 'm afraid we couldn't have done it any better, sir;

there must be some faults in every large undertaking.'

'I know I could improve upon the plan as it now stands, and then I should take the credit for the whole invention like the lucky beggars who improve upon other people's patents.'

'Your idea is that the laws of convention have spoilt the original plan?'

'Hang convention,' he said earnestly, 'it spoils everything.'

'And yet it is useful.'

'How so? To spoil the natural pleasure to be got out of living in a quiet place?'

Mirry-Ann thought for words, and then looked at the young man who was fast letting his feelings run away with his discretion. At that moment Mirry-Ann was not the person she desired most to be; she had lost her power to subdue.

'Well, sir, if we were allowed to sit all day alone, you and I, in this beautiful conservatory, there would always be the fear that I might fall in love with you?'

The Squire was about to speak when she stopped him.

'Wait a moment,' she said; 'I might fall in love with you, then there would be sorrow and trouble, for you could not possibly marry me, even if you pitied my hopeless passion and were willing to do so. It would bring a great deal of unhappiness—

your sister would never speak to you again, and the village would never forget that the Squire's wife was only old Ned Gawne's girl. Now the wisdom of convention saves us from all that. Convention protects us from ourselves.'

The graceful attitude Mirry-Ann had assumed whilst speaking, and her mock serious tones, tumbled down the last remnant of the Squire's reserve.

'Supposing I have fallen in love with you already,' he cried, 'supposing I love you better than to care what the world thinks—supposing that I were to ask you to be my wife?'

His eyes were aflame with the passion of youth, and he put out his arms to draw the girl to him. She held up her hands to ward off his words—'Oh, please, please don't, sir, you don't know what you are saying, have some consideration. I must go, indeed I must.'

But the Squire was deaf to the voice of caution—'I can't consider, dearest! fancy love considering—what poor cold-blooded love you would have!'

'Let me leave you, sir, for you are not serious. You are carried away by your feelings for the moment.'

'You shall believe that I am serious, Mirry-Ann—you must believe it. I would rather marry you than the greatest lady in the island. Oh, Mirry-Ann, there is no one like you in the whole world.'

'You think so at this moment, sir, but I must

save you from years of bitter regret. It is always a woman's duty in life to think first of the man's happiness.'

'Think of your own, Mirry-Ann, for I believe, dearest, that you do love me a little in your heart. Just tell me, dear, that, right or wrong as it may seem in your serious eyes, love has triumphed?'

Mirry-Ann was not a woman of quick wit, or ingenious brain. She was now filled with distress at her own inability to tell him that she did not love him. And to do it tenderly, in a way that would not wound his young vanity—this was her one thought. Mirry-Ann's weakness was her horror of giving pain or being the cause of suffering. She stood speechless in front of her lover, not knowing how to answer and too disturbed to think. Her silence was so sweetly submissive that he, with youthful confidence, took it for a modest confession of her love: in a moment his arms were round her, and he was about to kiss her, when Grace Christian came hurriedly into the conservatory. She stopped suddenly when she saw her brother, with his arms round Mirry-Ann, bending to steal a kiss.

Lovers caught unaware, however legitimate their caress may be, invariably look guilty. Frank Christian dropped his hands and stood sheepishly in front of Mirry-Ann, while his sister, the very picture of aristocratic dignity, looked coldly from one to the other.

Mirry-Ann put hers before her face, as if to shield it from the humiliation of the girl's silent scorn.

Miss Christian knew the value of self-control; she was too wise to rush into any hasty or undignified accusation, so, quietly turning to a work-table which stood a few feet away, she picked up a piece of delicate embroidery and went quickly out of the conservatory.

Neither of the two who were left looking miserably at one another spoke for a few moments. The silence seemed to last an hour to the girl. Then Frank Christian drew closer to her and put his arm again round her waist. 'Little Mirry-Ann,' he said, 'it is my fault. I have placed you in a false position in my sister's eyes, but, dearest, it is only for a few minutes. Will you come to her with me and tell her that you have promised to be my wife? I would have told her then, but you had not given me your promise.'

With a great effort the girl got her words together and forced herself to speak.

'Mr. Christian,' she said, 'you have made a great mistake. I do not love you, and if I did I could never be your wife. I could not be happy here in this big house. I have been brought up in a cottage, and I am only a village girl. I know that love is so great and so exacting that if I loved you I might put all these things aside to gratify my love.' Her eyes were trembling, and the long lashes were

fluttering like butterflies' kisses on her cheeks. 'I cannot but be proud of the great honour you have paid me, but it will be best for us both to forget.'

'Oh, Mirry-Ann, it is no honour; you have been brought up in a cottage, but the whole world can see that you would adorn a palace. Dear, you would grow used to living in this house, if it was your home. Will you try to love me, Mirry-Ann?'

'No, Mr. Christian, please don't press me. I do like you, perhaps, better than a girl of my position usually likes a gentleman of yours. Oh!' she said, a little sadly, 'how unlikely it would be that old Ned Gawne's girl should wed the Squire of Ballaugh!'

'Old Ned won't live for ever,' replied the Squire, but, as he spoke, the memory of the old man and the knowledge of the girl's faithful devotion to him stood out and hit him in the face. But he made a fight for loyalty, and was about to urge his love again when the girl stopped him.

'You must not say any more, I am going now. I have done wrong to stay with you and listen to the words that one day you will wish unsaid, but believe me, sir, the regret will be unnecessary, for all this will be forgotten as if unsaid. May I go out by the private door?'

Even in the heat of his passion and youthful egotism, there was a lurking admission in the Squire's mind that the girl's words might one day be justified. Though he loved her truly and tenderly,

he could not but see the many difficulties in the way of their marriage.

They were silent as they left the conservatory and walked across the old turf lawn to a little black wooden door in the boundary wall which would let her out on to the high road. It opened from the inside only. He stood for a moment with the door open for her to pass through. Their eyes met. His were reproachful and unhappy; her refusal of his love had robbed them of their boyish confidence.

'You will remember what I came for,' she said softly, 'and forget all the rest that has passed?'

'I can't,' he replied, believing that he meant it, not yet knowing what time will do for young lives, 'and my sister never will.'

When the little black door shut on Mirry-Ann, leaving the Squire standing alone in the privacy of his grounds, he realised that between her and himself was fixed a great gulf. Mirry-Ann had gone back to old Ned Gawne, and he had to face his sister!

Grace Christian feigned to be sewing the piece of embroidery she had taken from the conservatory, when her brother found her. She looked up as he approached, quickly dropping her eyes again to her work.

Frank took a seat and waited for her to open up the subject which filled both their minds. But Grace knew that perfect silence on her part would make the situation more difficult for her brother, and she

had no wish to spare his feelings. Manlike, finding himself forced to take the initiative, he plunged straight into it.

'You saw me talking to Mirry-Ann Gawne in the conservatory, Grace. I wish to ex——'

His sister interrupted him. 'Don't try to explain, please, has the girl gone?' Her tone implied such scorn for the innocent Mirry-Ann that the Squire's blood was up in defence of the woman he loved.

'Yes, she has gone,' he said, 'but I would advise you not to speak of her in that slighting tone of voice. Mirry-Ann Gawne is a woman to command any one's respect.'

'In a man's eyes, perhaps. I'm afraid women don't think so. Your conduct to her this afternoon somewhat belies your words.'

'My conduct to her was perfectly respectful.'

'Really? . . . Does a self-respecting village girl usually allow her master to kiss her—and do men usually respect girls who allow themselves to be kissed?'

'I am not Mirry-Ann's master, you are going too far, Grace; nor did I kiss her.'

'No, I forgot, I spoilt it, didn't I?'

Frank Christian rose from his seat and stood close beside his sister. His handsome, rather weak face showed that when his temper was once roused he could show fight.

'I wonder how nice women can be so cruel,' he

said; 'why do you persist in throwing mud at each other, leaving us men clear? I am to blame, not Mirry-Ann, for putting her in a false position in your eyes.'

'Excuse me, you have done nothing to change my opinion of her in any way, but I do not wish my brother's name connected with Mirry-Ann Gawne!'

'Don't you?' he said, towering over her with anger. 'Then you have to thank her for that. It would scarcely be honourable on my part if I continued to seek her society after what happened to-day, for the village would hardly credit her with having refused to marry me.'

Grace Christian laid her work slowly down, and gazed at her brother, the expression in her eyes plainly said, 'Are you mad?'

'I mean,' he went on, 'that at the very moment you came into the conservatory Mirry-Ann was refusing even to listen to my proposal of marriage. You can be so beastly nasty when you like, Grace, that you can put that news in your pipe and smoke it.'

His sister's eyes blazed, and her voice shook with passion. 'How dare you,' she said; 'oh, how dare you drag the name of Christian into the gutter? remember, please, that I bear it.'

'Hadn't you better change it soon? it scarcely suits your disposition.'

'Don't be flippant, please, this is no laughing

matter. If you have no pride, you might at least have some respect for your name. Are you not ashamed to own that to gratify your passion for this girl, who knows well how to play her cards, you have offered to bestow the name our forefathers have borne so honourably upon Ned Gawne's bastard niece! Oh!' the girl cried, 'what beasts men are! they would sacrifice anything to self.'

'Stop, Grace,' and Frank Christian caught the girl's arm and held it until she forced herself free. 'Would to God that you were a man at this moment, but only a woman's tongue would dare to say what you have said of the woman I love. You take advantage of the fact that I cannot thrash you.'

'You love her indeed!' and Grace laughed; 'I consider that it would be almost more honourable to court her love in the way her mother and grandmother were courted before her, than to drag your family name into dishonour, for it is dishonour to bring bad blood into a respected family.'

'You rank your pride of race too high, Grace. What have we sprung from better than the girl I love—you and I? Nothing. We were the same to begin with, only we made some money three or four generations ago. Mirry-Ann's family has continued obscure and poor because they carry on an honest trade, whilst ours rose from village insignificance by carrying on a dishonest one. Our forefathers were

plain fisher-folk until they made a fortune by smuggling contraband goods. When they had defrauded His Majesty King George's Government to the extent of an ample fortune, they ceased their illicit trade and lived in dignified idleness off the proceeds. Then they could afford to be loyal, and the eldest sons for many generations served with their sword the country their forebears had so successfully robbed. It is, alas, impossible to smuggle nowadays, or perhaps old Ned Gawne might have had a similar chance of starting an ancient pedigree. These fine soldiers who adorn our walls make you proud in the belief that you sprang from a race of heroes, but you forget that we inherit the blood of contrabandists.'

'Don't try to belittle your family. Smugglers at least were brave, and it was a recognised trade in those days.'

'Fishermen are brave also, but I have no wish to belittle my family. I wish to point out to you that it is only by dishonourable means that we are one whit better than Mirry-Ann Gawne. All this fine property was bought with illegal profits. And after all,' he continued, 'in this little island you think that we are somebody. We live in the "Big House," the children kow-tow to us, and we have sufficient to live upon comfortably as long as we live here, but if we left our island home and settled in London, or indeed any part of England,

who would ever have heard of Grace Christian of Ballaugh? You would be the merest cipher, and your income would be unnoticed.'

'Perhaps you are not aware that the girl's name is already connected with some one else?'

'No, the fact is news to me. Perhaps that is the reason she can't love me. I hope he is worthy of her.' Frank Christian tried to speak calmly, but his jealousy was roused.

'Some one who is too level-headed to offer his hand as well as his heart. Mr. Schofield is a very cautious lover.'

'Who told you Schofield loved Mirry-Ann Gawne?'

'I didn't say love,—you abuse the word; I said paid her attention. And how do I know it? Well, for one reason, because he has never attempted to flirt with your sister. He can have a better time with a girl of her class.'

'Mere woman's jealousy. I don't believe it. You expect every man to bow down and worship, Grace.'

'Not at all, pure worldly wisdom. Mr. Schofield cannot afford to marry, and a village flirtation holds more possibilities than one with the Squire's sister.'

'You will repent your bitter tongue some day, Grace. I don't suppose I shall break my heart because Mirry-Ann Gawne has refused to marry me.

The disease died out in the beginning of this century, for we Englishmen are taught to grin and bear so much that even love has to be conquered. But it will ache for many a long day, and even if I love again, and marry another woman, I shall always know that Mirry-Ann Gawne was more than good enough to be my wife.'

'Hear, hear!' the girl cried mockingly, 'quite a stump speech. You will have a seat in the House of Keys yet, Frank'; and folding up her work she left the room.

When the Squire remembered the mission upon which Mirry-Ann had come, he sat down at Grace's little writing-table and wrote a cheque for £10, payable to Mirry-Ann Gawne. No sooner had he written it than he realised that it was unwise to write the cheque in her name, so he quickly tore it in two, and threw it in the waste-paper basket. He wrote another cheque for the same amount, but made it out in the name of the Captain of the Parish.

The torn cheque caught Grace Christian's eye that evening when she went to her table to look for a missing letter. She placed the halves together and studied it for a moment, then threw it back in the basket. 'Men are loyal,' she said, 'he almost convinced me.' The torn cheque was inspected by yet another pair of eyes, and was again pieced together, but this time it was not thrown back amongst the waste paper.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next afternoon, as Mirry-Ann was walking through the village, she met John Thomas Costain. He was dressed in his 'walking-out' suit, and was going in the opposite direction to her uncle's house. John Thomas had been absent from the village with the fishing-fleet at the other side of the island. In fact, Mirry-Ann had not spoken to him: since she had seen him with Emily Corrin on his arm, she had endeavoured to keep out of his way. A look of confusion covered his face when he saw Mirry-Ann. He stopped abruptly in front of her.

'Are you going to meet Emily?' she asked; 'it's a lovely evening for a walk.'

'Yes,' John Thomas replied doggedly, 'you wouldn't come if I axed ye.'

'Oh, John Thomas,' she said, suddenly remembering what she wished to ask him and avoiding his comment, 'will you and Emily do something for me?'

'What's that?' he asked, and his blue eyes kindled with pleasure. 'It's little enough yer axin' me to

do; you've been kapin' mortal clare of me, Mirry-Ann, just as if I'd the chincough.'

'Will you gather some flowers?' she said pleadingly—'the best you can find. I'm wanted at home or I would gather them myself.'

'Would ye come with me, Mirry-Ann, if ye warn't wanted? it would be like the time when we wass childer together, when we went bird-nestin' and gatherin' May flowers to keep out the witches. Do ye mind the day, Mirry-Ann, when all the li'l ones wass throwin' the primroses, and buttercups, on the doorsteps to keep out the evil fairies, on the eve of May mornin'? You swept them off your uncle's doorstep and told us that it wass Jesus Christ you believed in, and not heathen superstitions. 'Deed, but ye were quare, Mirry-Ann. Would ye come, lass, joost for the sake of ould times?'

'But you are going with Emily Corrin, John Thomas; don't be foolish.'

'I'm walkin' out with Emily Corrin,' he said pettishly, 'because you've thrown me over and I'm tryin' to forget ye. What is it ye want the flowers for?'

'I want to make a wreath for the poor old woman's funeral to-morrow. You'll get some, won't you, Tom?'

'You know I would kill meself for ye if ye axed me, Mirry-Ann, but it ain't much ye're wantin' of me, only to gather some wades.'

'Thank you, John Thomas, you're too good to me,' and the girl made an attempt to hurry on.

'It's the Squire ye should ask, Mirry-Ann, for some genteel flowers out of his glass house, not wades at all.'

'Field flowers aren't weeds, John Thomas. I saw all the Squire's flowers the other day, but I love the wild ones best. Get me golden cushag, Tom, it's beautiful just now, and more suited to her poor grave than hot-house flowers.'

'A crown of cushag for the ould tramp's grave. I'll be takin' a sickle, Mirry-Ann,' and Tom laughed.

'Don't laugh, Tom dear,' she said tenderly; 'the wild-flowers grow in God's garden, His angels do all the pruning. God leaves *His* garden open to the whole world, so that the poor as well as the rich may enjoy it.'

'What the whole village can see no one wants to look at, Mirry-Ann; it's joost what we can't get week-days that makes the Sunday's dinner. Butcher mate would soon be as dull as herrin' if we could ate it every day.'

Mirry-Ann laughed at John Thomas's practical simile.

'You'll bring me the cushag in the morning, Tom, and we will make the wreath together. I see some one coming now.'

John Thomas frowned as he saw the short plump

figure of Emily Corrin appear in sight. Emily Corrin was a typical Manx maiden, clear-skinned and coarse-featured, with strong yellow hair and rather small clear blue eyes. Her even teeth made her coarse mouth rather attractive. When Mirry-Ann was well out of sight John Thomas was not averse to kissing the expectant girl; it would have pleased Emily better if her rival had seen his token of affection, but John Thomas took good care that this should not happen.

'Will ye come and gather some cushag?' Tom asked his sweetheart, for Emily Corrin had cleverly forced him into the position of an accepted lover. 'Mirry-Ann wants some to make a wreath for the ould tramp's grave.'

'A wreath of cushag,' and Emily's shrill derisive laughter grated on John Thomas's not too sensitive ear. It was all very well for him to laugh at the idea to the girl he loved, but no other woman must do it. 'Why not a wreath of nettles instead? they're common enough and won't sting her.'

'So are fools,' John Thomas said angrily.

Emily tossed her well-oiled braids of shining hair;—'You'd think the ould tramp wass her mother,' she said.

'Mirry-Ann's got a big lump of a heart, arrar',' John Thomas said tenderly. 'She wass always achin' for a mother. "John Thomas," she wass sayin' to me, "perhaps my mother wass buried in some

strange grave. I would like to do this in memory of her." Will ye come, Emily?'

Reluctantly Emily went; she was not sure enough yet of her man to thwart his wishes, but while they were gathering bright armfuls of cushag, she would take Tom's big jack-knife and cut a tall thistle, or a briar of blackberries.

It was a beautiful summer morning when the funeral passed through the village. The nameless coffin was borne by four stout fellows. John Thomas Costain in his 'walking-out' suit was one of them. Such a thing as a hearse for one of their class had never been seen in the village during the lifetime of the oldest in the community, at least not a real hearse carrying a human corpse. But many a person had seen the warning of approaching death — the phantom hearse driven by headless horses. Old Ned Kenwig, who kept the only pretension to a shop in the village, had seen the hearse pass Mirry-Ann's very door the day the old woman died.

So of course Ned went to the funeral looking as solemn as an owl; but now and again his thoughts escaped control, and in place of meditating upon the terrors of the Judgment Day as the occasion demanded, he found himself anticipating the glass of strong ale which would be served all round when the funeral was over.

A Manx funeral is always well attended, for a

death in the neighbourhood is an object of common interest to the whole community. A burial is a form of outing almost as popular as the open-air anniversary service. Every one from far and near thinks it his duty to attend a burial, partly from ancient and respectful custom, partly out of morbid curiosity.

As the little band of people passed solemnly along the village street the cottage blinds were drawn, and doors were shut. The men, in their best blue coats, left their women standing respectfully on the doorsteps, and joined in the procession until it had gathered a goodly number. If you had asked these men why they were following this nameless coffin to its last resting-place, they would gaze at you and find no better answer than—it had always been their custom to do so. Mirry-Ann's wreath of cushag rested on the coffin and caught the golden sunlight as it was borne aloft on the shoulders of the four young men.

Nance Quine and Mirry-Ann were among the few women who followed the body to the grave. Although the coffin was almost as light as that of a little child the bearers had to stop to rest now and then on the long road which led to the churchyard; indeed, there were the accustomed stones where the funerals halted every half mile, stones which had been used for this purpose from one generation to another.

Harvesting had commenced in the island, the noise of the reapers in some particularly sun-favoured field lent a cheerful note to the scene. A restless army of tom-tits and yellow-hammers chirped and chit-chit-chitted along the gorse hedge which divided the road from the corn, and a sky-lark, high up in the blue overhead, was delirious with song.

'Was there ever such a lovely morning,' Mirry-Ann said, 'for this poor little harvest in God's acre?'

Nance Quine had never been out of her island home and her old eyes had grown accustomed to its beauty. The sweet clear air, the colour of the land and sea, the endless charm of glen and mountain, had always been a matter of course to her.

After a hymn had been sung over the grave and every reverence of the last office of the dead paid, Mirry-Ann's golden wreath was left on the brown grave in the corner of the churchyard, near the spot where the wanderer had been found dead. 'It was joost as if she had chosen her grave herself,' said the sexton as he dug it, 'it's a rare cool place in summer.'

John Thomas walked home from the funeral with Mirry-Ann and Nance Quine; Mirry-Ann had been very gracious to him while they made the wreath together, and his heart was filled with hope. He climbed over the gorse hedge into a field of ripe

wheat, and gathering some ears he rubbed off the husks in the palms of his hands. When he had blown the loose chaff from the grain, he held up his hands to the girl's mouth and whispered—'Ye used to eat it like that long ago, Mirry-Ann, with blackberries for the jam.' And for the sake of the old days that were gone the girl put her pretty lips to the palm of his hand and picked up some of the grains. When she had finished the young milky wheat John Thomas had some fine blackberries ready for her. Old Nance Quine laughed softly to herself at the young fellow's honest ardour, and at the girl's unconscious air of condescension She was like a child princess being gracious to an attendant.

But when he offered her some more wheat she laughingly refused. 'I can't go on eating grain all day, Tom; please don't pick any more.'

But he held his hand out persistently, and answered her roughly—'You can if you like. Come on, ye could eat a deal more nor this when ye wass li'l, and hadn't so much room to hold it.'

The girl pushed his hand away; it was so like John Thomas to lose his temper over nothing; she had always to humour him to keep him gentle. He threw the wheat on the white highroad and kicked up a cloud of dust with his heavy brass-pointed boots.

'You've got a fine stomach at ye now as well as

a fine tongue, Mirry-Ann. I'll be kapin' my trouble for some one as knows how to thank me for it.'

'Tom, dear,' she said coaxingly, 'don't be so foolish, you're cross just because I don't want to eat more raw grain than is good for me.'

'When you speak like that, Mirry-Ann, and look at me with eyes that are joost like doves', I feel as saf' as a lamb. Take a wing,' he added abruptly, 'ye're lookin' tired,' and he hooked the girl's hand in his arm.

'No, no, John Thomas, I'm not really tired, please help Nance instead,' and the girl dragged her hand out of his tight clutch. And for the rest of the walk home she managed to stay on the other side of Nance Quine and address her conversation principally to the old maid.

In a few days harvesting had become general, and the fishing village was now busy with cutting and carrying corn. All hands were in requisition for the fields, and as a liberal supply of beer was always served to the harvesters and the young girls worked with the men, tying the bands and folding the sheaves, harvest work was highly popular.

One day a little bit of gossip reached John Thomas Costain while he tied a band Emily Corrin had just made round an armful of corn. They were cutting the Home Farm, and the Ballaugh

house servants had been turned out in the fields to help.

'What will you give me if I show you something I've got in my pocket, John Thomas?' she asked pertly. Emily took this same thing out of her pocket and held it above her head. It was a piece of paper with some handwriting on it. John Thomas snatched at it. 'Hould on, John Thomas, what'll ye give me for it?'

'Depen's on what it's worth.' John Thomas wasn't to be drawn into kissing her; he was now more than ever set on winning Mirry-Ann Gawne for his wife.

'It's a mortal quare somethin' about Mirry-Ann Gawne,' and Emily peeped at it again and held it behind her back. 'It's worth ten pounds to Mirry-Ann Gawne—if the master's name is good at the bank.'

A howl of rage came from John Thomas, like the cry of a wild animal. Emily was so frightened that she meekly handed him the torn cheque.

John Thomas Costain looked at the cheque for fully three minutes without speaking; the expression of mad cunning on his face forced the girl into conciliating him.

'What's come to you, John Thomas?' she said, 'it's only a bit of waste paper I found in the master's study. Mirry-Ann had been spending the afternoon with him, and he wass making her a little

present. He knows well enough that a poor girl can't put thanks in her pocket.'

With the growl of a savage dog he told the girl he had been courting a minute before to 'hould her d——d tongue.'

'Then give me back the cheque,' she said with tears in her angry eyes. 'I thought the sight of it would amuse ye.'

'Ye did, did ye, ye mean ferret!' and the cheque was torn in small pieces and scattered in the cornfield.

Emily Corrin tossed her fair head and her lips quivered. 'Ye'll be sorry for what ye're sayin' some day, John Thomas; if ye warn't as blind as an ould bat ye wouldn't have needed tellin' what the whole village knows, that Mirry-Ann Gawne is only houldin' ye off a bit till she's done courtin' with the Squire. She'll be comin' to ye, it's like, by and by, to get ye to make an honest woman of her. Ye'll be sorry some day, John Thomas, for treatin' an honest girl as ye've treated me.'

For the rest of the afternoon, while the hot August sun shone down on the harvest field, John Thomas Costain's heart blazed within him. He let his ungovernable temper have its sway. He refused every timid attempt at reconciliation on Emily Corrin's part. Over and over again he swore to himself that he would tear the image of Mirry-Ann from his heart and marry some other woman, only

it should never, never be Emily Corrin. He took a vow in his revengeful heart that no matter how long he had to wait his opportunity, he would have his vengeance on the Squire of Ballaugh.

CHAPTER IX

PRECEDING some strange event in a quiet life, an event leading to great issues, there is often a sense of oppression and warning felt by keenly sensitive natures like Mirry-Ann's. The workings of Fate, although sealed to the outward eye, create an atmosphere which to some extent warns and prepares the helpless individual. The drawing together of the moments which shall culminate in life's supremest hour creates a feeling which such natures term a presentiment. In the rush of the busy outer world there is little time to heed presentiments. They are driven out of the cities into the quiet country where men still have time to hear and listen to the unspoken warning. While Emily Corrin was sowing seeds in John Thomas's mind that would lead to a harvest of tears and sorrow, Mirry-Ann was engaged in the very practical occupation of 'siding up' her cottage. She was working eagerly, a nervous sense of some unseen force driving her forward to a crisis in her life.

So electric was the atmosphere that unconsciously she stopped her work now and then to listen. She

felt that it would be almost as well to sit down and so await the coming of the inevitable.

She had been so quiet during the past few days that the old man looked anxiously at her as she moved about the cottage with flushed cheeks and restless eyes.

'What's at thy tongue, chile? thou 'rt as sober-faced as a tomb-stone,—tell thy ould dad.'

'It's nothing, dad,' she said, knowing that she could never explain all that was in her heart.

'Has' thy courtin' gone wrong, lass?'

'No, dad, I was never much of a one to talk.'

''Cause it's some one younger yer wantin' to talk to than an ould fella like me, Mirry-Ann. It's time ye had a man of yer own, lass. It's a strange presentiment I've got that I'll not be with ye long.'

Mirry-Ann stared, almost frightened by old Ned's words. Was this to be the explanation of her presentiment?

'Don't say that, dad, don't say that,' she cried pitifully, 'I can't let ye go.'

'Ye're foolish, Mirry-Ann, I must be makin' room for John Thomas,—has he been near ye to-day at all?'

'No, dad—at least, not as you mean. I told you we weren't courting. John Thomas is walking out with Emily Corrin.'

'Is that the thruth ye're tellin' me, Mirry-Ann?'

The old man's voice was full of sadness. 'Is it the rale thruth?'

'Yes, dad, quite true.'

'Then it's thou as has drove him to her. John Thomas wass thy man, Mirry-Ann, for the takin' of him. How could ye do it, chile? John Thomas Costain is comin' into the farm that ould Ned Kenwig is lavin' at his death, and his people have been livin' in the only stone house in the village them three ginerations. I could die in pace, Mirry-Ann, if ye'd consent to have the banns put up. My Gough, but I'd be a proud man if I could see li'l Emma Gawne's chile married to a dacent man.' He paused and whimpered for a moment, then went on in a whisper: 'I thought maybe when ye'd stopped praychin' and halin' the sick and castin' out spells like, as ye'd be takin' a man, Mirry-Ann.'

'Don't break my heart, dad. I can't marry a man I don't love, just because his mother lives in a stone house and he owns two-thirds of a fishing-boat.'

'Yer that saf', Mirry-Ann, wastin' yer love on an ould man that's only a burthen on ye. Why ain't ye kapin' company and jolly-lookin' like the other gels?'

To avoid answering the girl opened the Bible press and began to dust it. She took out all the books and pushed the duster back to the farthest corner. At that moment the fates might have

whispered to the girl that she was getting 'warm,' as children say in the game when they see the seeker draw near the hidden thimble, for her duster swept out something to the front of the shelf—something which Mirry-Ann at first imagined was one of the religious tracts her uncle was fond of reading. He always kept them in the Bible press, and this one must have slipped far back. She took it in her hands to dust it before replacing it in its proper position.

A long parchment envelope, soiled and worn, addressed in a neat formal writing to Mrs. Emma Christian, was what she found the supposed tract to be. It might have lain in the press all the girl's lifetime, so naturally had she come across it, but Mirry-Ann knew that everything had been dusted and turned out of the Bible press each Saturday since she was old enough to remember.

Then the thought came to her that this yellow envelope contained some secret message for herself, that it had been laid there on purpose that she should find it and treat it as sacred.

She finished dusting the press and replaced the envelope until she could find an opportunity to look at the contents by herself. All the evening she wondered who had placed it there, and what was the meaning of it all.

That night, when old Ned was fast asleep, Mirry-Ann opened the mysterious packet, and what she

read in it was so wonderful that she doubted her own reason. Even with the stiff yellow paper held tightly in her trembling hands she grew afraid that she was under the spell of some hallucination, that her overwrought brain was imagining the strange story she read with difficulty by the dim light of the candle.

Was there nothing to tell her that it was real, that the parchment letter and the whole situation were not a fancy? She trembled with fear for her own sanity. She looked round the quiet little kitchen, and caught the blinking green eyes of the rumpy cat; she watched the slow moving of the brass hands of the tall clock, those unwavering hands which had only ticked away three minutes of her life since she had read the paper, but for her these minutes were a lifetime.

She rose and looked at herself in the small square glass which hung near the fireplace. 'My eyes are quite sane,' she said, 'and I feel no desire to do anything wild or mad, and yet I can see written here'—and she touched the yellow parchment—'what no human hand surely could have written or sane brain imagined. Oh God!' she laughed hysterically, 'it can't be true. I must be going mad. I will open the door and let in the company of fresh air, I am so horribly alone.'

She opened the cottage door, and a flood of fresh air tore into the room. The girl stood in a whirl-

wind of draught; a stiff wind was blowing off the sea, and driving the smell of rack up into the village. 'How good they are,' she said, putting her hands to her head, 'God's dear wind and sea.' She drew the fresh air into her lungs, and her reeling brain grew calmer. For a few moments she stood in silence listening to the wind, then she lifted the yellow envelope and looked at it nervously in the dim light by the door. Yes, there was the small formal writing, addressed to Mrs. Emma Christian, and the finger-marks on the envelope.

For two hours the girl sat reading and re-reading the strange document. One fact she found there which drowned all others—the fact that the poor weary tramp lying in the churchyard under the wreath of cushag was her own mother. Her mother, whom she had fancied dead long, long years ago, old Ned Gawne's li'l Emma of the merry smile and sweet blue eyes, changed to that poor broken creature with the mad stare.

'Dad must never know,' the girl said to herself; 'it would kill him. But if one part of the story is true—why not the other? If it is true, I am not Mirry-Ann Gawne, old Ned Gawne's girl, but Mirry-Ann Christian, the legal daughter of the late Squire of Ballaugh. Oh, mother, mother, *is* it true? Is it true that although I am poor and have lived in a cottage all my life, I am not unworthy to be his wife, that I may let him love me, and know that

there is no stain on my name—that though my father deserted you and wronged you cruelly, he was what the world calls a gentleman and my mother was his lawful wife?'

Then the full meaning of her thoughts swept through the girl's brain—the horror as well as the joy of it. If she was the late Squire's daughter by his legal wife Emma Gawne, whom he had married in a registry office in Liverpool, then the present Squire must be her half-brother—the illegitimate son of her father—and Grace Christian, proud, haughty Grace, was the baseborn, and not she. Then, too, her own father had been guilty of bigamy.

In the yellow envelope there was a copy of Emma Gawne's marriage certificate, given at a registry office in Liverpool; signed and sealed by two witnesses and the registrar. The story the poor woman had enclosed with this proof of her marriage was told in the simplest manner.

The Squire had married her when he was on the eve of emigrating to Canada, after he had sold out of an expensive regiment to pay his debts. He was at that time the second son, and the black sheep of the family. As an emigrant's wife, Emma Gawne would not be unsuited to his position, and she was pretty enough to turn any man's head. During the voyage to Canada, when the young husband had already begun to tire of his wife's simple companionship, his eldest brother was drowned, yachting off the

treacherous Calf of Man, and Emma Gawne's husband—the next heir to the estate—was immediately recalled home. As the wife of a colonial emigrant, the girl was charming, but to take her back to her native village, and install her as the Squire's wife there, amongst her own people, would be impossible.

So little Emma Gawne was left alone in Canada under the belief that her marriage at the registry had been a hoax, and that she was no better than his mistress. Young Christian was anxious to support her comfortably for the rest of her life, but the girl stoutly refused to accept his money. Her heart was broken, and she cared but little how she lived. After her child was born she worked her passage back to England, and thence to the Isle of Man. One dark night, when starvation stared her in the face, she left her baby in old Ned Gawne's boat and started out in the world again by herself. With a baby to look after, it had been impossible to earn a living. How she had supported herself during all the years that followed was not revealed.

The new Squire only lived some five or six years after his brother's death, and his wife died when their eldest child was twelve years old. She was a pretty English girl of good family, devoted to her handsome easy-going husband, whose life of pleasure was seldom clouded by the memory of the broken-hearted woman whom he had left in Canada.

The Squire's two children, Frank and Grace, lived a good deal alone under care of nurses at Ballaugh; for since that day on which the Squire had seen a little blue-eyed child sitting on old Ned Gawne's knee, and was told by some one that it was little Emma Gawne's child, the blue eyes of the child had a habit of spoiling his peace of mind. They seemed to hold an innocent reproach behind their silken lashes.

Emma Gawne's story went on to tell how, as she grew older and learnt more of the world, she had gone to the registry office in Liverpool where she had, as she supposed, gone through a sham marriage, and carried away with her a correct copy of her marriage lines. She had saved and stinted herself of the merest necessaries of life to have it proved beyond doubt that her marriage with the man, who had deserted her so cruelly, was strictly valid.

The name of Christian was so far-reaching in the Isle of Man that it conveyed nothing to the public registrar of Liverpool.

Emma Gawne had kept this proof of her marriage for many years, intending some day before her death to find her child and give the certificate to her, extracting a promise that she would never claim any right she might have to support from her father's estate. When she had parted from her husband in Canada, the young man knew that his wife spoke the truth when she said she would die of starvation

rather than accept a kindness from his hands. So from that source there was nothing to fear.

During his short happy life with his rich young wife he had grown himself to believe in the lie he had told Emma Gawne. It seemed now such a mad deed, this marriage with old Ned Gawne's adopted daughter, that it was easy to become a self-deceiver. But the little child in the village could not so easily be got rid of, and its likeness to his daughter Grace was uncomfortably strong.

CHAPTER X

WHEN dawn lit up the cottage Mirry-Ann folded up the precious documents and put the envelope back in the Bible press. How strange that a whole new world of thought and feeling should begin for her with the new day, and yet to all outward purpose her life would be the same! The girl never dreamt for a moment of letting the world know the secret her mother had kept all those cruel years. How could she, to gratify her own pride, bring ruin and disgrace on the young Squire who loved her? No, no, it was impossible, she told herself, for he would be penniless. The estate of Ballaugh was entailed, and it would, if it were proved that he was not the legal heir, pass into the hands of his uncle Robert, a man whom the whole village detested. Miss Christian had inherited her mother's fortune. If a provision were made for Mirry-Ann it would be through Robert Christian's charity. But how strange it was that she was to keep in her possession, unknown to the world, a document officially attested, proving that she, and not Grace Christian, was honourably born!

'Dear Lord,' the girl prayed in her heart, 'give me grace not to glory in the konwledge of her downfall.'

So automatic was the day's work in the little village that Mirry-Ann found herself performing her little trivial household duties with the same care and neatness with which she had fulfilled them in all the calm uneventful years of her life. Her fine sewing was laid in a white linen towel ready to be carried up to Ballaugh at twelve o'clock. The money she would be paid for it was very necessary, for her uncle, of late, since he had been so feeble and ailing, had asked for things which Mirry-Ann found it difficult to procure on the few shillings a week she had to spend on food. The old man knew the work was finished, he had seen the girl tie it up the day before 'ready for goin' home,' as he expressed it, and his eyes would look eagerly for something better than a salt herring for his dinner.

When Mirry-Ann arrived at Ballaugh, the servant told her that her mistress wished to speak to her, and she was shown into the morning-room.

'Good-morning, Mirry-Ann,' Grace said brightly. 'I wish to speak to you about what took place between my brother and you the last time you were here.'

Mirry-Ann was silent. The memory of the Squire's love-making, now that she knew he was her half-brother, was more than she could bear to hear discussed.

'I don't wish to accuse you of having encouraged my brother, I know how foolish young men are, but I wish to save you from the disgrace you are bringing upon yourself and your poor uncle.'

Still Mirry-Ann was silent. Instead of anger a great pity filled her heart, the irony of fate was so great.

'You have somehow managed to place yourself above your humble station in life. I think you are naturally a girl of refined tastes and feelings; at the same time it is impossible not to recognise that you inherit your mother's weakness of character.'

Mirry-Ann drew a deep breath and tried to still her heart to speak, but Miss Christian went on—

'Now, I have found a situation for you, as a lady's maid and companion to an old aunt of mine who lives very quietly. She can dispense with the usual services of an accomplished maid, and your fine sewing will be a great recommendation in her eyes.'

She paused and looked at the girl for an answer. For a moment there was silence. The pride and anger that were battling in Mirry-Ann's heart brought out the resemblance between the two women to a marked degree. At that moment Grace Christian hated the girl for her beauty.

'Can you go to your place in a week's time?' Grace asked impatiently, twisting two fine rings

round and up and down her slender fingers. She had dropped her cold grey eyes rather nervously under the anger of Mirry-Ann's.

'Miss Christian,' Mirry-Ann spoke with a voice so unlike her own that she scarcely knew herself that she was speaking, 'I am not going to a place, I cannot leave my uncle.'

'Oh, I forgot,' and Miss Christian smiled; 'I have thought about that; your uncle is to have one of the alms-houses which are just finished; he will be well taken care of, I will see to that.'

Mirry-Ann gasped for breath, and such a storm of rage swept through her that she trembled and felt sick. She leant feebly on to the back of a chair for support. Grace Christian was a little startled when the girl answered her, for the usually sweet soft voice was broken with passion. She had had no idea that this gentle-looking girl could be roused to such a pitch of resentment.

'Miss Christian,' she said, 'how have you dared to arrange my private affairs? What would you think if I found a husband for you, and told you to marry him, or sent you away from here to keep you out of the way? If I disposed of *you* and *your brother* as you have tried to dispose of my uncle and myself, would you not think I was mad? What right have you to send me away, or to put my uncle—who has lived an honourable independent life for eighty-eight years—into an almshouse? We are not your pensioners, we

do not live on Ballaugh land, our lives are as free as yours. We are not indebted to you for a single piece of bread. The work you have given me to do I have done for a few shillings where a shop would charge pounds.'

The girl paused, suffocated with the fulness of her own heart. Grace could hear it beating in the stillness of the room.

'You are an impertinent, low-born girl; you forget whom you are addressing.'

But Mirry-Ann had not forgotten, and her heart was crying out for justice and for the right to break her mother's trust and to humble the proud woman in her turn. But she only said with the gentleness returning to her voice—'Not low-born, Miss Christian, only humbly.'

Heedless of the remark, Grace continued in a patronising manner—'To save you from yourself and from repeating your mother's story I have taken the trouble to find a good home for you, where you will enjoy far greater comforts than you can afford in your own cottage, and you are not only ungrateful but abominably impertinent.'

'My mother's story was not shameful, I have lately found proof of her marriage: she was cruelly sinned against.'

'Can you show your proof to the world?'

'If I did, innocent people would suffer.'

'A little too unselfish a reason, I think. In a case

like this you ought to clear your mother's name at any cost. It is your first duty.'

'The temptation is far greater than you can possibly imagine,' the girl said sadly: 'but the misery it would bring upon others who are innocent would kill my happiness.'

'For John Thomas Costain's sake I think it would be fairer; he holds a good position in the village.'

'My name is entirely my own affair, Miss Christian; neither you nor John Thomas has anything to do with it.'

'But I heard you were to be married? Surely he has a right to be considered.'

'You have been misinformed. I have no intention of marrying John Thomas.'

Grace drummed on the polished rosewood table with her fingers.

'I hope you have not thrown an honest fellow over because of my brother's foolish attentions. You are surely too sensible a girl to let a good husband slip through your fingers for the sake of the idle love of a man in my brother's position?'

'Your brother has not insulted me by idle love-making.'

'"The Squire," if you please,' said Grace haughtily. (Squire was a term not used in the Isle of Man, but Miss Christian had insisted upon this conventional form of address from their tenantry.)

'Your brother,' repeated Mirry-Ann slowly, ('and

mine,' she said in her heart,) 'may be foolish, for I am only a poor girl; but I am as free as yourself, Miss Christian, and I have every whit as much right to insult you as you have to insult me.'

'Stop, you impertinent girl,' Grace said angrily, 'I know more than you think! Leave the room.'

Mirry-Ann kept her steady eyes fixed on the angry face of the girl opposite her, and said very deliberately:

'It may seem to you merely an idle threat, Miss Christian, but if you try me too far I will tell you something for which even I, Mirry-Ann Gawne, have reason to pity *you*, yes, even to patronise *you*.' And Mirry-Ann turned to the door without another word or look at Grace Christian.

'You think I don't know, you foolish girl, that my brother offered to marry you. If he has got you into trouble, he is only acting as a gentleman should.'

'Oh God!' The cry escaped Mirry-Ann's lips like the cry of a wounded animal, and her hands went out as if to ward off the insulting words. 'Oh, that you should think such a thing!'

The horror and insult of all that the angry girl was saying in her ignorance of the truth, added to the strain under which Mirry-Ann had lived for the past few days, was more than the could bear. Her head suddenly dropped on her chest, and deep distressing sighs rapidly following one another told

Grace Christian that Mirry-Ann was fast losing consciousness; before she could reach her, to help her to a chair, the girl had fallen to the floor.

Grace rang the bell so impatiently that Emily Corrin, who was the first to hear it,—indeed she had not been far from the back of the door during the stormy interview,—answered it at once.

'Mirry-Ann Gawne has fainted,' her mistress said coldly; 'quick, bring me some brandy.'

When Emily Corrin returned with the brandy she found Miss Christian standing over the unconscious girl, a helpless look on her face. She stood silently watching while Emily administered the brandy and opened the collar of the girl's dress. As there was no sign of returning consciousness Emily looked up at her mistress as if she expected some explanation of Mirry-Ann's strange conduct, but Grace remained silent.

'She's gone off dreadful bad,' Emily said in a frightened tone, 'there ain't no sign of life at her at all.'

'What is the right thing to do, Emily?' Grace asked in a bewildered way. 'I've often heard but I've quite forgotten; one always does forget at the critical moment. What can we do?' She wrung her hands together. 'I wish I knew.' Her heart was really softened by Mirry-Ann's deathlike appearance.

'Goin' off ain't very common in the village, ma'am,'

Emily said slowly. 'I can't get her to take no brandy at all. She's not lettin' a single drop pass her throat.'

'Try sprinkling some cold water on her face. Here, quick, hand me that glass of flowers.' Grace threw the tall-stemmed red rose on the floor, and sprinkled a full handful of cold water on the girl's calm, upturned face. As she did so men's voices were heard in the hall: some one called her, it was her brother.

'Grace, where are you?' he cried. 'I've brought Mr. Schofield up to lunch with me,' and before Grace could answer, her brother had come into the room, followed by Dick Schofield.

'Hush,' Grace exclaimed, and she held up her hand to ward the two men off. 'Hush!'

'Great Scott, what's up? some one ill?' her brother asked in a whisper.

'Yes, Mirry-Ann Gawne has fainted,' Grace said in an agitated voice which she tried to subdue to coldness. 'I have tried brandy, but it has no effect—what shall I do now?'

She turned her anxious eyes to Dick Schofield.

At the sight of the girl, lying like death, half-way between Grace's easy-chair and the floor, the two men had turned pale with agitation; neither could find the voice to speak. Dick Schofield was the first to recover active sense. He knelt down beside Mirry-Ann, and, raising her head, bent it gently forward.

No word was spoken, but Grace Christian's quick eye noted the expression of tenderness on his face, and the Squire noted it too. Perhaps now he would believe her words. It seemed to both Grace and her brother that several minutes passed before a gentle, quivering sigh escaped the lips of the unconscious girl.

'Brandy,' was all that the anxious lover could say, and held out his hand for the glass. Very firmly he forced some through her lips, and with her next sigh a few drops passed into her throat. A pitiful gasping for breath, followed by weary sighs, and then a long quiver of returning life trembled through her body, as her heart began to flutter painfully.

'Please go away,' Dick said, 'she may be startled to find herself here when she comes to her senses.'

'Come, Frank,' Grace said, putting her arm through her brother's. 'Perhaps Mr. Schofield is right. She is coming round, and so many of us standing here will frighten her. I will send some one to relieve you, Mr. Schofield, and will you follow us to lunch?'

In the hall she met the parlour-maid waiting to serve lunch. 'Quirk,' she said, 'we will wait upon ourselves; go and see if you can do anything to help Mirry-Ann Gawne, she has fainted, and Emily Corrin is with her in the morning-room. Let her rest on my sofa until she has completely recovered,

and see that she has some lunch when she feels well enough to eat it.'

In this way Grace contrived to get her brother out of the room before he said or did anything foolish, but she had no intention of leaving Dick Schofield alone with the fainting girl. Even in her anxiety Grace had noticed that Mirry-Ann's throat was as white and beautifully moulded as her own. Where had the girl got her breeding? She asked herself this a dozen times during the silent lunch that ensued. While the two men sat with the same thoughts filling their hearts, Grace was considering the advisableness of changing her attitude towards Dick and Mirry-Ann. 'I won't take any more notice of his silly flirtation,' she said to herself, 'I will do nothing to stop it, but let the girl take him to save Frank. One or other of them will make a complete fool of himself over her, and which is it to be? Do I love my brother well enough to do this?—I hate giving in. . . . Oh, if Dick had only flirted a little with me, when I wanted him to at first,' she said, 'I should never have thought twice about him—his calm indifference made me wild.' She looked at the young man whom she had been piqued into loving. 'Just an ordinary male person,' she thought, 'nothing the least out of the common, not nearly as handsome as Frank, and without a brass farthing in the world. I wonder how long I should care about his love if I had it.'

Neither Dick Schofield nor the Squire made the least pretence of substituting polite conversation for the natural outflow of good spirits. The former did not mind if Miss Christian did see that Mirry-Ann Gawne's illness had spoilt his lunch, and her brother was too angry with her to speak, for he felt sure that Grace had in some way caused Mirry-Ann to faint.

'Will you join us in a walking tour round the island, Mr. Schofield?' Grace asked suddenly,—she felt that something must be said to break the silence. 'We are getting up a little party, and we mean to do the tour easily and comfortably.' She did not in the least expect him to accept, but it was a safe topic for conversation.

'When do you start?' he asked.

'After the Mheillea (Harvest-home), I think, when the weather is cooler.'

'When is your Mheillea?'

'In about ten days' time; some of the fields in the High Farm are always late, you know.'

'Ours is to-morrow night. Mrs. Hedges is very busy making preparations; it's wonderful what the men can eat on a night like that. Your brother has promised to come and help us through.'

'It is like Mrs. Hedges' luck,' Grace said with a laugh. 'Her harvest is always in before any one else's. But when it is over, if we get up the party, can you come? It will be rather fun, I think.'

Dick Schofield took time to answer, and his voice was a trifle unsteady as he spoke. 'I 'm afraid I can't,' he said. 'I meant to tell you that I am leaving the island directly after our Mheillea.'

'But you are coming back?' Grace said with a little gasp. 'We haven't fixed any time to start.'

'No,' he answered, 'I am not coming back, for I have taken your advice. I am going to take up some serious occupation. I am not going to waste my time any longer.'

'Not coming back?' Grace said, her voice full of surprise, and an unconscious sadness softening her grey eyes. 'Why, what has happened?'

'I 've been thinking over your good advice,' he replied casually, raising his voice at the same time, 'and I have concluded that I have idled long enough.'

'Oh, I didn't mean anything. No one could say you were idle. I was only in fun.'

'So was I, when I first came here, but I 'm older now. I must leave off being in fun. Being comfortable and happy is all very well, but it doesn't add to your banking account, does it?'

'May I ask what you are going to do?' The man's casual voice had hurt her pride; it was so evident that he had no wish for either confidences or sympathy.

'The Clerk of the Rolls has got me a very good appointment in London,' he said; 'I only hope I

can fill it; it is entirely through Mrs. Hedges I have got it.'

'Has she quarrelled with her governess, that she wants to get rid of him?'

'Not at all. I explained my case to her, and she insisted on my trying "to better myself." I think she'll miss me just at first more than she knows.'

'I wish I could send my brother away too,' Grace said with meaning in her voice, as she rose from the table. 'He certainly won't better himself by staying here. You are wise to run away from the danger.'

'I am only running away so that I may come back all the quicker,' he said; but Grace did not hear his remark.

CHAPTER XI

THE Mheillea at the farm was a great success. The supper of fat geese, and prime roast beef, and black Sally's fat hams, had been well patronised, and the supply of home-brewed ale had been most liberal. After supper the big barn was cleared for dancing, but it was not a popular form of entertainment. Dancing had for so many generations been denounced as a sin by the strict followers of Wesley, that the younger generation, which was becoming more lax in its religion, had not the instinctive love of dancing in its bones. Just as in Scotland almost every form of social entertainment ends with dancing, so in the Isle of Man everything, to be at all popular, must end with singing.

But before the singing commenced there was a 'toffee-join.' A large pot of toffee was made on the kitchen fire, and then brought into the barn to cool in flat dishes. The fun of the evening began when the loving couples took a piece of soft toffee and pulled it out between them until it became a long band of shining gold. There was much chaff and

laughter when some gold band which had been pulled out to its farthest to test the lovers' faith, suddenly snapped. John Thomas Costain had insisted on trying his luck with Mirry-Ann, and his luck had failed in this very way. The girl's heart leapt with fear when he turned with a savage curse to the laughing onlookers, who took the matter as a joke, although there was a certain amount of prophecy in their laughter.

The Squire in his turn took a piece of toffee and asked Mirry-Ann to pull it with him. She would fain have refused, but to have done so would have been more conspicuous than to consent. The band of toffee had not broken, but was stretching out thinner and thinner, when, time being up, the bye-standers cried out for the knot to be tied. The Squire was on the point of complying, when John Thomas suddenly dashed forward and cut the thin band in two with his fist. He turned a face flushed with beer and jealousy on the Squire, with an impudent grin.

'I forbid the banns,' he said insultingly.

Mirry-Ann flushed crimson at the outburst of vulgar laughter which followed. John Thomas moved towards her, and was about to put his hand through her arm and draw her away, when Mrs. Hedges stepped forward.

'Mirry-Ann,' she said, 'come and help to choose some part-songs. I think you've all had enough of

the toffee-pulling for to-night. You must wrap your lovers' knots up in that buttered paper and take them home.' The crowd of laughing men and women respectfully made way for the girl to pass with Mrs. Hedges to the other end of the long flag-paved kitchen.

Mrs. Hedges took Mirry-Ann's arm in hers. 'Don't be so upset,' she said affectionately, 'they've not very refined feelings, have they? and they are more or less excited.'

'I didn't want to come,' the girl replied; 'John Thomas Costain has been half mad lately, and beer always excites him, but uncle was set on my coming.'

'I'm sorry it happened, dear, but you take things too seriously; forget all about it. I'm glad the Squire had the good sense to let it pass. John Thomas has a violent temper.'

But it was not easy to forget the unpleasant incident with John Thomas hovering near her all night, hoping to raise her jealousy by paying Emily Corrin familiar attention. The Squire had tactfully withdrawn from the scene, to spare the girl's feelings.

Emily Corrin was gay with triumph, she felt that for once she outshone her rival. What could John Thomas Costain find worth courting in a girl who could not even join in the fun of the Mheillea, and who looked so sad and serious in her plain black dress? Miss Christian had presented Emily Corrin with a fine blue silk sash from her last season's

wardrobe, which she wore over an ostentatiously starched white piqué dress.

But what John Thomas saw no woman's eyes could understand. He saw the woman he loved with the whole strength of his dogged narrow nature passing further from him than ever. He saw her mixing in the happy crowd of village people, who were mostly too shy or too familiar, looking like the Governor's wife herself, as he expressed it in his heart.

A bow of black velvet, looped through her shining hair, was the only addition Mirry-Ann had made to her usual afternoon dress. That the girl was beautiful no one could deny, but it was not her beauty that stirred John Thomas's heart.

He had never hated Emily Corrin as he hated her that night, when she gave him a vulgar account of how Mirry-Ann had 'gone off' up at Ballaugh the day before, and how Miss Christian had given her 'a bit of her mind.'

The merry-making broke up at midnight; it had begun at seven o'clock. Mrs. Hedges and Dick Schofield were both tired out with the exertion of the evening. Dick had scarcely spoken to Mirry-Ann; he had not yet told her that he was definitely leaving the island; it was impossible to do so that night, for they had no chance of a private conversation.

Mirry-Ann was the first to leave the farm. She had tried to slip away unobserved to avoid the risk

of a *tête-à-tête* walk with John Thomas, but his jealous eyes were watching her, and he suddenly shook off Emily Corrin's arm, and hurried after the retreating figure of Mirry-Ann.

'I've come to see ye home, Mirry-Ann,' he said; 'I don't care to stop no longer.'

'You'll vex Emily, Tom,' the girl said, 'and I can see myself home well enough.' The girl would have liked to remind him that he had offended her and insulted the Squire, but she was alone with him, and his temper frightened her.

John Thomas held on to the girl's shrinking arm, and strode on, almost pulling her with him.

'D—— Emily Corrin,' he said. 'Let the *Squire* see her home; he'll be waitin' somewhere near here, I reckon, for somebody.'

'I can take care of myself, John Thomas. Let me go.'

'I'm thinkin' I'd better see ye safe home, for I'm no so sure of that.'

'What do you mean, John Thomas? and what right have you to speak to me as you have spoken to-night?'

'I mean this, Mirry-Ann, that ye want some honest man to protect ye. I've been hearin' that the Squire's been makin' free with ye, and that's why ye won't look at a rough fellow like meself.'

'John Thomas,' Mirry-Ann said softly, in her most persuasive tones, for anger had a disastrous effect

upon the love-crazed youth, 'you promised you would never speak to me like that again; you promised you would only ask to be my great friend; now you 've broken your promise.'

'For the Squire's broken me heart,' he said doggedly, 'and ye 've tould me a lie, Mirry-Ann.'

'No, I 've not broken my word. I 'm always willing to be your dear friend.' John Thomas's grasp tightened on her arm. 'Let me go!' the girl cried. 'Oh, you hurt me!' but he still held her fiercely. They were now within a short distance of her uncle's cottage.

'Ye said ye hadn't any love-falin's at ye, Mirry-Ann. Ye said it warn't 'cause I wass a rough chap with no book-larnin' at me; and now ye 're full of love-falin's for the Squire. . . . Mirry-Ann,' he said hoarsely, 'have ye forgotten yer religion and taken up with sin?'

As John Thomas finished speaking his face was suddenly lit up by a curious glare of light. It came from behind the girl, for they stood facing each other, and her figure remained in the deep shadow. The burst of red light, which lit up John Thomas's face, spread out in a crimson glow over the sky. Then it died down or was obscured by a volume of smoke which tore up with the wind.

John Thomas suddenly dropped the girl's arm and started to run. 'My Gum, Mirry-Ann,' he cried, 'is the ould man all alone?'

The girl's heart had turned to stone; she was literally paralysed with fear. 'Yes, he's all alone. Oh, John Thomas, if you love me, save him.'

It is impossible to describe adequately the hopeless conflagration of a village fire. In the whole countryside there was not a fire-engine, and old Ned Gawne's little thatched cottage, which was as dry as a rainless August could make it, made a good bonfire in the fresh night breeze. The majority of the inhabitants, who had not attended the Mheillea at the Farm, were old people or little children, and they were all sleeping soundly when the fire broke out in the farthest end of the village.

John Thomas, with Mirry-Ann's last words ringing in his ears, did the service of a fireman. As he ran at full speed down the street, he shouted 'Help, help, fire, fire!' but there were only a few old sleepy heads to heed it. Mirry-Ann remembered that and ran back towards the Farm whence the merry-makers were coming idly home.

The ablest of the men were soon on the scene of action, but hand-pails of water were of small avail to deter the fury of the fire, which had started in the straw thatch, no one knew how, for the old man was insensible when they carried him out. John Thomas Costain had dragged him down the narrow box-stair on his back, spread-eagle fashion, and not a moment after parts of the roof fell in over the old man's bed.

John Thomas was honestly working in the cause

of humanity, but as he staggered out of the burning pile with the old man on his back, and caught Mirry-Ann's look of gratitude, and felt her tender clinging to his arms, he realised that the supreme moment of his life had come. The few poor pieces of common furniture in the kitchen were saved, and were now standing grimly in the street. A horrible smell of charred wood and quenched straw—for the Colby cottages were straw-thatched—filled the air. The little home was a pitiful sight. When now and again the flames seemed to have been in a measure got under by the continuous supply of water from the long line of pails which had been formed to reach to the nearest roadside pump by a band of willing workers, one furious flame would dart out and lick up into the clear night blue of the summer sky as if it had suddenly escaped from captivity. Then the eager faces of the women and idle onlookers would suddenly become brazenly vivid, and the utter devastation of the little cottage more appalling than before.

The fuschia tree was bruised and broken, and its branches were covered with smouldering, water-soaked thatch, and the rosemary bush would never more be a token of remembrance, or the sweet lavender a playground for white butterflies.

Old Ned Gawne had been taken off to Nance Quine's cottage, which happened to be the nearest, and Mirry-Ann stood for a moment beside John

Thomas, who was almost overcome with fatigue, looking at the remains of her devastated home. With a sudden cry she left him and flew to the door of the burning cottage. John Thomas sprang after her and held her back, but the girl was stronger than the man at the moment. 'My uncle's Bible,' she cried, 'I must save it!'

'Stop her,' the men cried, 'she 'll be kilt!'

With a determined thrust John Thomas pushed her aside and plunged into the kitchen. The smoke and steam were blinding, and heat as from a furnace filled the room, but as there were no flames round the wood-work of the raftered roof the corner press was reached in safety, and as John Thomas seized the old man's Bible the words of the fourth Song of Solomon came into his brain, and he remembered the night when he had read them with Mirry-Ann—'Behold, thou art fair, my love, thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks.' Yes, his love was fair, and he was winning her to-night. He stumbled through the scorching steam and blinding smoke back toward the door when he heard a warning shout—they meant to warn him, but did not particularise the danger; he staggered to the door just as a huge mass of burning thatch slipped down from the roof.

Brave hands did their best to rescue him, but for some moments he lay almost smothered in the burning thatch. Then he too was borne off unconscious to Nance Quine's cottage, and the big Bible, which

had been preserved below his coat unsinged, was given to Mirry-Ann Gawne.

The girl turned her back on the burning cottage, and followed the unconscious figure of John Thomas. Her little home, with all that she and her uncle possessed, was now left to smoulder away in the lovely summer dawn. But what did it matter? What did utter destitution matter as long as John Thomas was not dead? Oh, if she had killed him!

An hour or so later, when there was nothing more to be done, the last handful of tired villagers gradually dispersed and drifted to their different houses. The cottage stood by itself, so no further harm could arise from the smouldering bonfire within the shell of the four whitewashed walls. It had taken just the hours between midnight and dawn to utterly devastate the home in which the oldest inhabitant of the village had lived for eighty-eight years.

It was the early morning of the second day from that of the fire when John Thomas awoke from the stupor of unconsciousness he had lain in from the time he had been carried to Nance Quine's cottage. Old Ned Gawne, too, had done little else but sleep since John Thomas had saved his life. His feeble system had received a severe shock, and there was no young life in him, such as there was in John Thomas, to resist it. The old man made no fight for recovery, he accepted his end as inevitable.

With the assistance of Nance Quine, Mirry-Ann

had nursed John Thomas, and watched eagerly for his returning consciousness. The doctor had visited him during the night, and had warned Mirry-Ann that his waking was likely to prove the critical point of his recovery. He had also warned her of a terrible fate that might be in store for the man: he had reason to fear that the nerves of the eyes were seriously affected.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN John Thomas awoke, his brain was clear and steady. The long refreshing sleep seemed to have restored his nervous system, and he took the light nourishment Mirry-Ann had prepared for him eagerly. She was almost afraid to speak to him lest she should discover that there was truth in the fear which had haunted her since the doctor's warning.

'John Thomas,' she said softly, 'thank God, you are better. It is so good to see you come back again. You seemed so far away when you were unconscious, I couldn't reach you to thank you.'

John Thomas sighed, and a contented smile lit up his heavy face. 'Were ye langin', Mirry-Ann?'

'Yes, dear, I was longing dreadfully. You risked your life to please me, and I couldn't have lived if you had died.' Mirry-Ann was weeping.

'Is it wapin' ye are, Mirry-Ann?—but I 'm not took yet, lass, I 'm only feelin' dreadful wake.'

'You were so brave, John Thomas, and I was so selfish. It was all so dreadful, but you are better now. Oh yes, you are really better, and you are going to get quite well.'

'Would ye care that much if I wass took, Mirry-Ann?' the sick man murmured brokenly to himself. 'But I'll not be goin' to die if you feel like that at all.'

'Yes, I would care,' she said. 'I thought you were going to die, and that I had killed you, and that you would never, never know how grateful I was, or speak to me again. I have prayed all night, John Thomas, and God has heard me.'

'He's mortal good, Mirry-Ann. Will ye put up a prayer for me and thank Him?' John Thomas moved feebly. 'It's powerful dark, I'm thinkin'; I should like a light to see ye, lass.'

Mirry-Ann stared at John Thomas's open eyes in stricken silence. Her fear was realised. The early morning sunshine was flooding Nance's little cottage while the girl was dressing his burns with oil, but she left his side, sick and stunned, and went in silence to the window. She closed the little shutter to shut out the brilliant morning. She must give herself time to act and to think; the doctor had cautioned her against any excitement.

'Is that a bit lighter now?' she asked, standing heart-sick by the window, miserably awaiting his answer—Oh God, if he should say it was just the same!

'Not a ha'porth. Maybe it'll be mornin' soon, Mirry-Ann, for I'm hearin' the ould roosters crowin'.'

The girl forced herself to speak and to lie for his sake, while she opened the shutter again.

'Yes, dear, it will be dawn soon, try to be patient.' She sat down beside the bed, limp and shattered. How was she to tell him that his dawn would never come—that he had begun a new lifetime of endless night—that the dear green earth and the sky and sea would all be merged in the one blackness of this little room? With the rapid working of an excited brain she found it easy to picture to herself the beautiful world one vast, empty, black ocean.

'Mirry-Ann,' he said, 'it would be more cheerfuller like if you would light a lamp. I wass always hatin' the darkness.'

A stream of sunlight shot right across John Thomas's bed as he spoke, and the girl's intense face was bathed in it. 'The burns is mortal bad, and the darkness seems to be makin' them more worse like, if I could just put a sight on ye I shouldn't feel them that bad.'

'Is the pain so bad, dear?' and the girl moistened the bandages again with oil. 'I wish I could ease it.'

'I 'd like powerful to put a sight on ye, Mirry-Ann, for I know, when ye're spakin' saf' like that an' genteel, that yer eyes is joost like doves'. It 's tremenjious hard not to see ye when yer spakin' lovin' to me for the first time. Strike a light, lass, and look at the clock. I can hear the ould thing tickin' over yonder as busy as a hen with her chicks.'

Mirry-Ann rose and struck a match and held it to the face of the clock. You could scarcely see its flame for the bright sunshine, but her courage failed her; she could not tell the poor impatient man—who would not bear to wait the coming of one morning—that Nance Quine's clock was pointing its warning fingers to ten o'clock, that it was only with him there was darkness.

'It's no time at all by this foolish clock, it's quite wrong,' she said, telling her sad lie with a tearful laugh. 'I quite forgot, Nance only keeps it ticking for company's sake.'

John Thomas laughed too, feebly. 'An ould maid's husband, poor company instead of a man, Mirry-Ann, I'm thinkin'—don't you?'

'Hush, dear, you must try to sleep again. It will bring the morning sooner.' The pitiful deceit the girl was practising seemed to turn her to stone, she could almost have said anything. John Thomas was tired enough to obey; he drank the sedative she gave him, and in a short time was fast asleep.

Mirry-Ann sat by his side, wearied with misery. If John Thomas was permanently blind, he was blind for her sake. It was she who had turned his daylight into darkness. He had saved her uncle's life out of common humanity, but he had gone back into the fire and lost his eyesight for her sake alone. John Thomas had rescued the proof of her mother's marriage, her mother's dying gift to her, at the cost

of all that was worth having in his simple life. A blind fisherman—who could imagine such a thing? He could no longer tell the state of the sea by the expression of the moon's face. It would be cruel to feel the breath of the storm but never to see it . . . to have the deep blue round Bradda's High Head all one flooding blackness. Oh, surely it was better a thousand times to die! To live and to have to bear the sufferings of the world and never to see its beauty! A thousand beauties of mountain, sky, and sea danced before her mind's eye.

'John Thomas,' she said, looking at the sleeping figure of the young fisherman, 'God *must* restore your sight, let me be the atonement.'

With a flash of inspiration as she said the words, the full meaning of the atonement came to her. She held her breath and listened, but the voice which was speaking was only the conviction of her own heart, yet she heard the unspoken words with painful distinctness. 'My love must be my atonement, my eyesight must be his eyesight, my life must be his. Oh God, had all this misery to happen before I could see my way clearly! God's will be done.' In a flood of silent weeping she knelt by his bedside and tried to pray.

A gentle knocking came to the door. Mirry-Ann rose softly, and hurried to answer it, quite unexpectedly she was confronted by her lover. She stood

before him feeling as if a lifetime had passed since they were lovers together, or since it had ever seemed possible that she could marry him. There was no tender love in her tired eyes to lighten the expression of misery that had suddenly killed the youth in her face. The distressing change in her appearance startled him. He could not venture to speak words of love, when he saw how deeply she was suffering. His first thought was that her uncle had just died, for he had heard that he was not expected to recover from the shock.

'What has happened, Mirry?' he said, 'why do you look like this?'

She put her hand on his arm as if to steady herself, and tried to speak.

'I—can't tell you, don't ask me to tell you now. Please leave me, I can bear it better alone.'

'Bear what, dearest? You must tell me, Mirry. Is your poor old uncle dead? Mayn't I try to comfort you? I love you so. Let me send that look out of your eyes; won't you let me, dearest?'

'No. My uncle is not dead,' she said, 'and you must never speak to me of love again. Don't you see that it will kill me if you say any more? I must go back to John Thomas.'

'Is John Thomas better?' he said, a little coldly, hurt by the girl's refusal. 'I came to say good-bye —is this how we are to part?'

'John Thomas is asleep,' she said, and spoke softly

to warn him. She seemed scarcely to have heard her lover's words of farewell.

'I have come to say good-bye, Mirry,' he said again, still feeling heart-wounded at her aloofness. But to the girl it was as if a long time had elapsed since the night of the Mheillea, when Mrs. Hedges had suddenly told her that Dick Schofield was going away. Now she felt only surprise that he had not already gone. The last twenty-four hours had been like years to her. The wreck of her home, and her fear for her uncle's life, mingled with her anxiety for John Thomas, had for the time drowned the importance of her own selfish love.

'Good-bye,' she said wearily, not lifting her eyes to his. He had taken her hands and had tried to draw her to him.

'Mirry,' he said, with a determined effort to break through her reserve, and touch her feelings for himself, 'will you let me hope? I shall be able to marry you in a year's time—will you wait for me? Mrs. Hedges will give you a home, you can live with her and take my place, she requires some one to help her.'

'No, no, no!' suddenly broke from her lips as she drew herself from his arms.

'Why not?' he said, startled at her vehemence. 'My darling, you love me, and in time your uncle will give you to me. When I come, ready to marry you, then he will believe I am not an idle lover. We

can keep our secret, sweetheart; only I must have your promise.'

'My uncle will never get over this shock,' she replied; 'don't make my task harder than I can bear.'

'Dear heart,' he said, with a sweet tenderness in his voice that reduced the girl to physical submission, 'what new task?'

Mirry-Ann turned her head to where John Thomas lay, and pointed to him with her eloquent eyes.

'I am going to marry John Thomas,' she said, with a pitiful fight for loyalty to the unconscious man in her voice.

'Good God, Mirry! what do you mean? Are you mad? Oh, my darling,' he said, with desperate entreaty in his voice, 'don't frighten me! I know you are capable of any self-sacrifice, but don't sacrifice us both. It isn't right. Are my life and love of no account? John Thomas saved your uncle, but he will recover. He can't expect it of you. Any able-bodied man would have done the same.'

'He is *blind*, and it was for my sake,' she said; '*now* do you understand?'

They had moved into Nance Quine's parlour opposite the room in which John Thomas lay. They could hear Nance at her spinning-wheel as she watched by the old man overhead. The busy whirr, whirr, and the tap, tap, of the footboard on the floor broke the oppressive silence that followed the girl's words.

'John Thomas blind!' her lover said, his face turning a dead white.

'Yes, blind,' Mirry-Ann said, 'quite blind. And he can't bear darkness even for a minute. John Thomas lived by his eyes, they were his brains. Oh, it is too cruel to a man like him—with no resources in himself. You see now,' she continued, with a desperate conviction in her voice, 'that it is my duty to make his life more bearable. I sent him back into the fire.'

'What for?' her lover asked, almost sternly. 'Oh, why was not I there, why didn't I win you by risking my life?'

Mirry-Ann took a deep breath before she answered—

'I asked him to save a paper which meant a great deal to me . . . it meant . . .' the girl said with her voice full of the tenderest love, 'it meant that I might perhaps one day have married you. It was the certificate of my mother's marriage. I found it in the Bible press. I could not let it be burnt, for I had forgotten the address of the office she was married in.'

'Oh, Mirry!' he exclaimed, 'oh, my poor love! your mother's story was nothing to me. Did you think I cared—have I lost you for so little?—God have pity on us both!'

'But it was everything to me,' she said; 'until I found that paper I would not have married you.

After I knew that although my father broke my poor mother's heart, that the blood in my veins, on his side at least, was as good as yours, and that I had no reason to blush for my birth, I thought,' said Mirry with a world of regret in her tone, 'that if our love proved good and true, and your theory that we were destined for each other seemed right, that I . . .' she hesitated, 'but I was all wrong, I see now that it was never intended, I had fought against marrying a man of my mother's people—against obeying my uncle's wish, until this dreadful thing happened to show me my duty.'

'Your sacrifice is too great, it almost amounts to insanity,' he said passionately. 'My love, my dear, dear love, it is too horrible that you, my own sweetheart—my dear, pure heart, should marry a blind man whose very touch is distasteful to you—a man whose caresses will make love hideous in your eyes—and our love is so sweet! What am I to do! Have pity on me, Mirry; how can I live and think of you as his wife?'

'Oh, hush!' she said, 'have pity on him, he needs it most. Perhaps I imagine the horror of blindness more vividly than you, for in my lonely life the beauty of Nature has been everything to me—Nature was my lover till you came. John Thomas is only a child of Nature; without his eyesight he is lost. Think! shut your eyes, and think!' she cried, 'where the horizon in darkness lies. His world is limited

now to the space he stands in. I must make a new world for him, I must make him see.' She paused for a moment, then said almost in a whisper, 'Good-bye; God give courage to us both.'

For one exquisite moment she lay in his arms, and he kissed her weeping eyes, and fondled her wonderful hair. The droning of the spinning-wheel in the room above made a mournful music to the girl's low sobs. Ah, the comfort of his touch, and the love in his gentle caresses! They were each other's now, the girl unresisting, and the world forgotten. Dick Schofield, with love's unconquerable hope in his heart, forgot that his momentary joy was rooted in despair. With the girl he loved in his arms mutely confessing her love by gentle acceptance of his kisses, how could he realise that some day she would marry the village fisherman lying asleep in the cottage kitchen?

When John Thomas awoke he was impatient of the continued darkness.

'Mirry-Ann,' he said fretfully, 'it's a mortal long night; open the shutters. It seems as if I had been slapin' for hours and yet it's as dark as night.'

'You've been asleep rather less than an hour, and the daylight is bad for your eyes,' Mirry-Ann replied, trembling with the misery of the task imposed upon her of breaking the truth to the unsuspecting man.

'My Gough, Mirry-Ann, but it's dreadful weari-

some lying here in the dark. Let the light in, lass, I'll risk hurtin' me eyes.'

Mirry-Ann took John Thomas's poor scorched hand in hers. 'Dear John Thomas,' she began, in the soft voice he loved to hear, 'be good and brave, for I want to tell you that your eyes are very, very bad. If I open the shutters and let a glare of light in, you might never, never see again.'

''Deed, but that would be a shockin' pity, Mirry-Ann,' he said, as far from the truth as ever. 'But I'm as good as blin' lyin' here like a bat; how long is the doctor to be kapin' me in the dark at all?'

'I don't know how long you may be in the dark,' she answered, feeling what bitter truth lay in her words, 'but if I were always to stay near you and try my best to tell you about everything that is going on around you, would you try to be patient, dear?'

'If you wass contented like to sit here and hould me hand joost like that, and let me know by yer voice that ye love me, Mirry-Ann, I'd stay in this dark hole as contented as a sand-louse all me days.'

'Dear, dear John Thomas,' the girl said, and for the pity of it her blue eyes too were blind with tears, 'dear John Thomas, I will stay with you always.'

A sob escaped the blind man, and hurt the girl, as a man's weeping always does affect a true woman —'Oh, Mirry-Ann, joost to think of it, joost to think that it's li'l Mirry-Ann Gawne that's sayin' them

lovin' words. An' it wass me that wass always courtin' and never gettin' no love from ye at all, and now ye're joost as sweet and lovin' as a dove with its mate.'

The girl's double deception was driving her on, she must offer herself to him now. 'If you were to suffer always, John Thomas, would—would—would you be happy if I were your wife?'

The blind eyes tried in their darkness to find the eyes that were like doves'. 'If I wass clane blin' as a mole, Mirry-Ann, for the rest of me life, I'd be as saucy as a conger with you for me wife, but it would be dreadful hard not seein' ye at all. I'm that langin' to put a sight on ye now, Mirry-Ann, that I'm thinkin' I'll not give me eyes a chance.'

'John Thomas,' and the girl's arm went round him tenderly; half shrinkingly she kissed him, trying to mingle some love with her pity. 'Can't you guess what I'm afraid to tell you? don't you understand, dear, I must be such a good wife to you that you will be able to see through my eyes? My eyes must do for us both. Oh,' and the gentle voice broke into weeping, 'it may be His way of drawing us closer together. Can you bear it, John Thomas? My heart is breaking for you.'

'Is it clane blinded I am, Mirry-Ann?' John Thomas's voice seemed to penetrate out of the darkness that distanced his world from her, and the girl's weeping choked her answer.

'Don't be friken' to tell me, Mirry-Ann; with ye lovin' me and houldin' me in yer arms I can stan' a powerful dale of trouble.'

Mirry-Ann's part was easier to play because of his blindness. If she could control her voice, her eyes would not betray her. The man had accepted with so stout a heart and such simple dignity the dreadful fate which had befallen him, that the admiration she felt for his courage strongly endeared him to her.

'Yes, John Thomas,' she said, 'the doctor was afraid that your eyes had been affected. I was warned what might have happened. If I could only give you mine! It isn't fair that you should suffer all this for me.' She tried to control her horror of blindness, for the orders were that John Thomas was not to be excited; she must try to make him believe that there still remained some hope. 'It may only be temporary, dear; the doctor says the nerves will perhaps come right again in time.' There was a pathetic note of forced encouragement in her voice which contradicted her words.

John Thomas did not answer. His mind was in a curious chaos. It was as impossible for a sailor, whose eyes were ever looking into things beyond, to contemplate the horrors of a life-long blindness, as it is for the man whose destined span upon earth is but threescore years and ten to realise the meaning of eternity. John Thomas knew that a great

blow had fallen on him, but he found it impossible to believe that this horrible darkness was to remain unbroken for the rest of his life. It was well for him that the terror of his affliction was to come upon him gradually; and, above all, that there was at the moment the crowning happiness of Mirry-Ann's love, for he never doubted but that his illness and the danger he had gone through had suddenly convinced the girl that she loved him.

'Mirry-Ann,' he said after a long silence, 'tell me the houl' truth. Could ye do with a blin' man?'

'Yes, yes,' she said eagerly, 'don't ye know I could? I care for you now as I never did before—all women love brave men.'

'My Gough, Mirry-Ann, but women are mortal quare fish. It's always hidin' their rale falin's they are, till, all of a suddent like, somethin' dreadful happens to the man that's courtin' them, and then it's the mother in them that's out joost as sure and sartin as the spring's comin' after winter. A woman's always lookin' for somethin' to take care of—'deed, but it's strange though.'

'We understand so little of those dearest to us, and the world we live in and help to make,' she said sadly, 'that sometimes the great loneliness makes one afraid.'

'Ye've a mighty fine way of sayin' things, Mirry-Ann, mighty fine. Even if I'm not quite under-

standin' it all, it's doin' me good to hear ye talk. Could ye do some radin'?'

It was a relief to be allowed to read the Bible instead of to respond to John Thomas's love-making, so the girl quickly agreed to his request.

CHAPTER XIII

ABOUT a month from the night of the fire, when John Thomas had almost regained his health, Mirry-Ann's uncle, old Ned Gawne, died.

He had been sinking towards his end in a dreamy, half-conscious state for many days before it came. His brain had never been quite clear since the night he had received the shock. Mirry-Ann and John Thomas were sitting in silence in the room where he lay, chained by such a feeble thread of life to their earth that they were both startled by him speaking quite clearly: it was as if his voice had floated from another world.

'Mirry-Ann, are ye there, lass?' he said; 'I'm wantin' ye near me, chile, for I'm thinkin' that I'm about goin'.'

The girl rose and went to his side.

'Yes, I'm here, dad, houldin' thy hand.'

'Mirry-Ann,' he called her again, softly, 'if I war only sure sartin that you'd take John Thomas for your man it would make me goin' asier like.'

John Thomas got up when he heard the words, and felt his way to the old man's side.

'It's thou that's houldin' me back on this side, Mirry-Ann, for I darn't lave ye. The Lord's waitin' right over there, chile,' and his dim eyes turned towards the sea, 'and I'm dreadful langin' to go to Him. Can ye see Him, Mirry-Ann, houldin' out His han', and li'l Emma with Him?'

'John Thomas,' the girl whispered hoarsely, knowing that the words she was about to speak were to seal her doom, 'John Thomas, tell him I've promised.'

John Thomas felt for the old man's hand, and held out his other for Mirry-Ann's. Solemnly the girl put her hand between his and the old man's which was cold with approaching death.

'Ould Ned,' John Thomas said proudly, 'we're axin' thy blessin', Mirry-Ann an' me. We've been doin' a dale of courtin' since you wass took bad, and we've fixed things up now.'

The glazing blue eyes of the dying man gleamed suddenly with a youthful brightness, and he struggled to find breath to speak.

'God bless you, Mirry-Ann, God bless you, John Thomas.' There was a pause for a moment, and when the old man spoke again John Thomas had bent his ear to listen—'John Thomas, you'll be mighty kind to yer wom-an. She likes a dale of lovin', does Mirry-Ann. An' if she's a bit saf', John Thomas, be aisy with her. She's not one of them sort as can stan' a bit of scouldin'.'

'I 'll promise all that, ould Ned,' he said reverently. 'It 's easy to be kind to her when I 'm lovin' her like I do.'

The old man lay without speaking for some time, the little flame of life that had burnt up so brightly had waned again. Mirry-Ann and John Thomas still stood hand-in-hand watching his last moments.

'He 's trying to speak,' Mirry-Ann said, and she placed her ear close to his lips.

'It 's makin' me go aisy, Mirry-Ann. Are ye there, chile? would ye put up a prayer?'

John Thomas and Mirry-Ann knelt down, and together they said the Lord's Prayer in Manx—

'Ayr ain t' ayns niau, Casherick dy row dt' ennym. Dy jig dty reeriaght. Dt' aigney dy row jeant er y thalloo myr te ayns niau. Cur dooin nyn arran jiu as gagh laa. As leih dooin nyn loghtyn myr ta shin leih dauesyn ta jannoo loghtyn nyn 'oi. As ny leeid shyn ayns miolagh; agh livrey shin veih olk. Son lhiats y reeriaght, as y phooar, as y ghloyr, son dy bragh as dy bragh. Amen.'

The girl knew that the dying man loved the sound of the familiar prayer in the old language that was nearest to his heart. It is impossible to imagine the fine flow and musical rhythm there is in the prayer if it is spoken by one who knows the Manx language well enough to let the words undulate and lapse into each other. Soft murmurs came from

his lips in place of his old accustomed groans, and the repetition of particular lines. The girl waited for a moment, then she repeated the last words again, 'For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.'

'Son lhiats y reeriaght, as y phooar, as y ghloyr, son dy bragh as dy bragh. Amen.' The old man raised his head from the pillow and said the words slowly after the girl. His dim eyes were gazing at something beyond with an expression which told Mirry-Ann that already his feet were in the deep waters, that he had seen Jesus.

Then his head fell back, the peace of death was on his face, the feeble light had burned out, old Ned Gawne's girl was left alone to the care of blind John Thomas.

The months that followed his death were the most terrible of Mirry-Ann's life. A strong reaction set in from the mental excitement she had been labouring secretly under for many months. There were now the dull autumn days to be spent principally in John Thomas's company, uneventful days of ponderous devotion, which forced themselves upon her as a foretaste of her whole future life.

She had leisure now to weigh and consider the position she had rushed into at an overwhelming crisis—at a moment when gratitude and pity were her strongest feelings. Her pity for John Thomas had increased instead of lessened, for it was, as she

had expected, only as time went on that the man was able to realise his own pathetic condition. How it hurt the girl to see him daily press a bit of sea-weed to his cheeks to *feel* the state of the weather from its variable texture instead of reading with his eyes the sailor's message in the sky; or when his mates called out to him on their way to and from the port, leaving him sitting like an old man past the day's work yet knowing by long custom just what each man was doing. He began, too, to realise feebly in his blindness the exquisite beauty of the world he was now excluded from, feeling it as he had never felt it when he had eyes to see. John Thomas in the days of his youth had looked upon a day as beautiful if it was favourable for fishing, or dry for harvesting—a day in fact that could be put to some practical use. It was strange, he thought, that the pictures that now forced themselves upon his brain had other beauties in them. He loved to recall the dazzling heat-rays in the clear island atmosphere, or the exquisite stillness of drifting clouds hovering in a circle round the top of some green mountain near the sea, or the tearing scud rushing inland from the Atlantic, enveloping even Bradda's proud Head in its wild chase. All these things seemed now to belong to the truest pleasures of life. That deep sympathy with Nature which had been Mirry-Ann's birthright only came to John Thomas as a mournful regret. Beauties of land and sea were now reflecting

themselves upon his brain in a way exactly similar to a dreamer's reflections of some object or incident which had quite unconsciously affected his brain while awake.

As the long autumn days slowly passed, John Thomas grew fretful and irritable. He was more deeply in love with Mirry-Ann than ever, but he had begun to take her unselfish attentions to himself as his right and a matter of course. He was living again in his own stone house, and Mirry-Ann was sharing Nance Quine's cottage, but John Thomas's people let the girl understand that as she was to be married to John Thomas in the spring, they expected her to take upon her shoulders the burden of amusing the blind man. And the blind lover was terribly exacting. If Mirry-Ann did not appear at the very moment John Thomas had appointed, he grew uneasy and suspicious, for there was always Emily Corrin's tittle-tattle about the Squire's attentions to Mirry-Ann to feed the old fire of hatred which had burnt and burnt in his heart until it had affected him like a deadly poison.

Mirry-Ann had kept the secret of her mother's marriage to herself. She had dwelt and pondered over the subject until there seemed no clear way out of the difficulty but the one sure way of perfect silence. It would be impossible to tell John Thomas half of her story without telling it all, and now more than ever, as she was to be his wife, it would be

better for their chance of happiness if her position in his eyes remained unchanged. It seemed to be her duty more clearly every day to marry and to take care of this man who had lost so much for her sake, and day by day, as she watched his narrow limits of life and heard his fretful murmuring, she prayed that her atonement would in some way compensate for the affliction she had brought on him. John Thomas's blindness had the effect of almost suffocating him; he never grew more accustomed to the darkness, but felt that each succeeding day must of necessity bring daylight. His mind was living in hideous imprisonment, rebelling and waiting for release. His other senses had not developed as acutely as might have been expected, for he had taken no trouble to use them. He was blind, and there was an end of it; for him there could never be any substitute for sight. He merely laughed when Mirry-Ann assured him that blind people grew in time to know the sense of colour by touch.

'My Gough, Mirry-Ann,' he would exclaim impatiently, 'that fellow's blindness wass only shammin', it warn' d——d ugly blackness like mine at all,' and so to comfort John Thomas was impossible.

What good could it do any one to tell him that she was the deserted daughter of the late Squire of Ballaugh—that the young Squire who was well liked by every one in the village was not the rightful owner of Ballaugh, that he ought to be turned out

into the world penniless, and his uncle Robert reign in his place?

It was thus that the autumn days slipped into winter, and the mild island winter broke into spring. Once more the fleet was getting ready to sail, and the little village was all astir. In a few days there would be none but women and children left, and a few ailing old men; even the boys who had just left school were getting ready to go off to sea to serve as cooks on board the boats. Some of the men were provident enough to have learnt a trade to occupy the winter months. John Thomas's marriage suit had just been cut and sewed by one who was half tailor, half fisherman. But in the spring-time the tailor would give up his cross-leg seat on the kitchen table and lay aside the old suit that was to be turned and the bales of blue cloth waiting to be made into chapel clothes with the promise that they should be finished in time.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN THOMAS and Mirry-Ann were to be married before the fleet went out; John Thomas had urged it, for the movement of life and bustle in the village had made his own state more unbearable than ever. Perhaps if he had seen the look of uncomplaining misery in the girl's eyes he would have hesitated ere he accepted his own happiness at such a price; but his pity for himself, and the desire to make his life as bearable as possible, left him little thought for others. His passion for her had become almost a mania, and often the girl doubted if in his heart he really loved her, or if her society was indeed the pleasure to him that he imagined it to be, for he was now constantly complaining of her lack of spirits and accusing her of being poor company for a fellow who had to depend on what he heard for the pleasure of his days. He thought nothing of confessing his annoyance at the fact that, although he was soon to be married to the girl whom he had loved every day of his life since he had carried her books home from school, he had no sympathetic insight into her true nature. This

he seemed to look upon as her fault, yet, bluntly sensitive as he was, he felt very keenly that in their married life Mirry-Ann would ever be treating him with womanly pity—that her love for him was but the outcome of her tender loyal nature.

And yet there was no mistake about the anxiety John Thomas evinced for the girl's presence; it really seemed as if his whole being was burning with a devastating fever when she was away from him; but instead of her return bringing peace and repose to his mind, he was fretful and jealous of her repeated assurances of devotion.

This man who had accepted the knowledge of his blindness so quietly, and thus unwittingly kindled a new respect for himself in the girl's heart, was growing day by day more irritable and discontented. He was no hero now. He was feeling the spring, the neighbours said, and the spring was mighty trying to some folk.

John Thomas was feeling the spring, but not in the manner their words suggested. He was feeling the spring in the song of the birds, the scent of the black-thorn, the cries of the young lambs, and indeed in the consciousness of all things green and tender renewed upon the earth. Even the blind man was instinctively aware, without referring to the months, that it was spring-time, and that the beauty of youth was over all the land. The glossy leaves of the celandine were turning the brown ditch-sides

green, and here and there precocious pimpernels were asserting their belief in sun-worship. But the birth of spring had come without hope for John Thomas, it had indeed forced its poetic charm on his senses only to make his blindness still more blind. With the return of spring a young man's healthy desire for an active busy life awoke in him a heart-sick longing to be up and busy about his fishing. Ah! if he had only eyes now he would enjoy every little occupation which before had only gone to make up a day's work.

On one of these spring days Mirry-Ann had deserted John Thomas for a few hours to wander over hill and dale, and into the dark glens full of soft uncurling ferns and nesting birds. These secluded glens, so typical of the island's rich beauty, had boastful little streams playing through them, where fish of goodly weight were often caught. Mirry-Ann had some youthful association with almost every step of the Colby stream; here she had paddled in it as a child and reached for the big blackberries which hung so full and cool, just over the water's brim; there, on the tall rowan tree which lent one branch to form a bridge between two high boulders on either side of the stream, she had sat and read the few books which had been awarded to her as prizes at school. One deep 'dub,' as a pool is called, held the miller's trout which had grown so fat and wise that no man had ever succeeded in

catching it. Then there was the beautiful open piece of greensward right in the middle of the glen, called the Fairies' Mound, which the children were afraid of passing even in the daytime. As she wandered on, living in the memory of the past, her step grew elastic, and the present became entirely forgotten. She walked heedless of where her feet were leading her, trusting to her instinct to take her home when she was bodily fatigued. For the time being, it was enough to drink in the deep throat-notes of the cuckoo as it journeyed through the glen calling out over the distant hills its amorous song of spring. The pungent scent of the soil was sweeter than a bouquet of flowers in the girl's nostrils, for her heart was throbbing and beating for spring. She would lie down on the green moss banks to get closer to the dear earth. The fir needles pricked her soft cheeks, like the sweet pain of her lover's parting kisses. She lay for a moment on the steep bank with her face pressed against the mossy pillow. The cuckoo's note was travelling further and further from her. She heard an eager trout now and then splash in the water below. Suddenly a footstep came stealthily towards her and a hot breath swept over her face. She started up in alarm, but only the meek brown eyes of a calf gazed inquiringly down on her. It had strayed from its mother in the field beyond. She put her hands into its soft mouth and let the young thing lick her fingers; the tickling sensation thrilled

her nerves. She would have pulled her hand away, but the calf clung to it. A half-hysterical laugh burst from her lips; the calf was frightened, and flew bounding and gambolling into the field. 'You dear, dear young thing,' she said. 'Do you know that everything is beautiful and you as well—that though my heart is broken, to-day I can forget it? To-day I won't let myself think for one single moment. I will just feel and see God's beautiful world.'

She rose to her feet with impatient haste. There were a hundred spots she wished to visit on this glorious spring day, a hundred dear memories to recall. She almost tripped and fell as she hurried over the rough ground; the beauty of the world was all her own to-day, soon she would have to share it with blind John Thomas. Nature was her lover once more, as it had been in the days long ago when they had wandered and wandered in sweet, silent sympathy. Those were days when it was a joy to be alive because she was young and the world was beautiful and Youth holds a kingdom of Hope—those were the simple days when she had seen God's hand in all things clearly pointing out her duty. Duty itself had been so simple.

She wandered on to the opening of the glen at the foot of the mountain valley and followed the stream by its bank. The sharp click and the whirr-whirr of a fishing line pulled taut by some rebellious trout caught her ear. She looked up suddenly and saw

the Squire of Ballaugh fishing within a few feet of her. Curiosity to see whether the fish would be safely landed kept her perfectly still; she stood with eyes fixed on the line which the Squire was playing in and out to humour the antics of the struggling trout. Suddenly the fish appeared high in the air, and then by an adroit turn of the wrist was landed safe on the bank just at the girl's feet. Mirry-Ann gave a breathless little ejaculation of surprise and admiration and knelt down on the grass beside it.

'What a beauty!' she said, with eager eyes upturned to the man standing above her. 'It must weigh quite half-a-pound.'

Fishing was the only form of sport which awakened no pity in Mirry-Ann's heart. She was a true fisherman's child in that respect, for to her all kinds of fish, from trout to whales, seemed the legitimate and natural food or sport for human beings. There was no fox-hunting in the island to arouse her sympathy for the fox, but the sight of a pack of beagles in full scent after a panting hare was loathsome to her. What pleasure could be derived from running a gentle beast to death she never could understand; she had often argued the point both with Dick Schofield and John Thomas; but the skill required to deceive a trout into the belief that an artificial fly was real, and thereby to hook him, held some scientific claim to being sport. A net full of shimmering herrings was a beautiful sight in her

eyes, just as black nets (meaning empty) were ugly. So now, though she turned her head away while the Squire unhooked the wriggling trout and broke its neck, its sudden death did not demand her pity. He opened his fishing-basket bedded with soft moss, and was about to lay the fine trout in it, when she laid a detaining hand on the lid.

'Let me see, please; have you had good sport?'

He looked into her eyes before he opened it, and the girl dropped hers in embarrassment. Then he raised the lid mechanically and held the basket to her for inspection.

'What a fine basketful!' she said, a little nervously.

'Yes,' he said, 'I was out early, but it's too clear now. I shall have to leave off.' He wound up his reel and swung the basket round on his back. 'Where are you walking to?' he asked. 'May I come with you?'

'I'm going to nowhere,' she said, trying to speak naturally.

'Then I will go to nowhere, too,' he said. 'It is much nicer wandering to nowhere on a day like this than doing something prosaically definite, like going home to lunch. No, don't be afraid,' as he saw her eyes grow troubled, 'I won't distress you with any unwelcome attentions. I hear the date of your marriage is fixed. I must wish you happiness.'

They walked by the bank of the stream, and the gurgling and running of its waters over a rocky bed

broke the silence and saved her replying to his words. The lights on the monntain were as beautiful as they had been half-an-hour before, the cuckoo's note was as full, but for the girl the magnetism of the spring had died out; it was no longer smiling with the assurance of youth, a shadow had fallen on the landscape. Going on their idle way they came across a table-shaped rock—a tempting seat in the sunlight.

'Will you rest here,' he said, 'and tell me about your marriage?'

The girl sat down wearily. She was wondering within herself if it would not be wise to tell him her true relationship with himself, without divulging her mother's whole story. The suggestion forced her lips into speech, for she knew at the moment their eyes met that it was morally the right thing to do.

'Yes, if you will listen,' she replied; 'there is something about my marriage and myself that I must tell you, for it concerns you as well as me.'

He sat down beside her wondering at what she had to say, fondly grasping at a hope that it might be a confession of love for himself. And so it came to pass on that sweet spring day, which was to have been her one careless day of roaming, that Mirry-Ann told the Squire, with her head bowed in shame, the story of his father's love for her mother.

When she had finished, she sat nervous at the painful silence, waiting for some comment from the man at her side, but the gurgling river went hurrying

on over the shallows and boulders, and the green linnets chirped and twittered as they flew with staccato movement from bush to bush—earth's many voices filled the air, but the man remained silent.

'Pray God I have done wisely in telling you,' she said at length, tenderly; but she spoke to deaf ears, for the Squire was momentarily unconscious of sight or sound—thought dominated every sense. Mirry-Ann's eyes travelled over mountain, sky, and glen; attentively she watched the gathering and parting of the white cloud which drifted round the heights of Barrule. The cuckoo's two liquid notes were faint now, the homeless wanderer was nearing a gorse cover in the foot-hills. She repeated to herself the old rhyme, which always came to her with the first cuckoo's song—

> 'A cuckoo's note in May is worth a ton of hay,
> A cuckoo's note in June is not worth a silver spoon.'

She put her hand on the Squire's arm a little pleadingly. He turned and looked at her; there was an expression in his eyes as if he was seeing her as she really was for the first time.

'Is this quite true?' he asked. 'Are you perfectly certain?'

'I am quite, quite sure, perfectly certain.'

'Have you unmistakable evidence? could you prove it?'

'Yes, I could prove it; but I never shall. You

must promise that—no—no—no one but you must know,' she said earnestly. 'Not even John Thomas: it is a secret between you and me.' Her eyes besought him to comply.

'Oh God!' he said with a cry, 'to think that you are my father's child: to think that—he was the cause of all your mother's suffering: to think that I loved you!' A great sob of horrified misery shook him.

'Can you not love me a little as a sister now?' she said pleadingly.

He rose to his feet and looked down on her. 'No,' he said, 'you ask that too soon. You do not understand. Can there be no mistake? how has the secret been kept so long?'

She looked up at his pale, agonised face questioningly. He was still looking searchingly down at her. 'Of course it is true, your undeniable proof is in your very existence. You are more like my father's people than my sister Grace is.' He put his hand before his eyes and groaned—'How are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children!'

Mirry-Ann rose and stood by his side.

'Do you blame me for telling you? I thought that if we were to go on living in the same village, and if we were to see each other very often, it would make my life a little easier if you thought of me differently—if you learned to look upon me——'

'Yes, yes,' he said gently, 'I see, I understand. It

made the knowledge of my love hideous to you. You were right to tell me—and I thought my love for you was so pure!'

She stood, without speaking, by his side, feeling as if she was in some measure to blame for her father's sin. She had brought this misery upon him. His face, so handsome in its boyish beauty, seemed suddenly withered. She hated herself for having told him.

'Mirry-Ann,' he said, forcing himself to speak, 'I will go away, and I will not come back till I have learned to think of you as my sister. My love for you was a pleasure to myself; I loved you with all that was best and highest in me—and now it is a crime.'

'Oh!—but you will—' the choice of words to express her meaning delicately was hard to find, 'you will keep our secret—you will never by your treatment of me arouse suspicion; if you avoid your home and me——'

'No, no,' he answered sadly, 'I will never do, anything which will betray your mother's secret or cast slur on *our* father's name. He died an honoured man; he has left his children to bear the shame.'

'Thank you,' Mirry-Ann said, 'and you may trust me. Your sister shall never know.' She held out her hand to say good-bye. 'I will go home now.' She knew that the world she had opened to him

excluded her, and yet she had only told him the half of what she knew.

'Good-bye, Mirry-Ann, good-bye,' he said, trying not to detain her. 'Our walk together has taken us further than I thought.'

CHAPTER XV

A FEW days after Mirry-Ann's meeting with the Squire, when John Thomas was sitting alone waiting for her usual evening visit, Emily Corrin looked in on her way to chapel. She had been a pretty frequent visitor at John Thomas's stone house of late, and the nervous over-wrought man had grown to enjoy the chatter of her busy tongue, for she was not above repeating to him any evil gossip going through the village, or telling him a coarse joke with a hearty laugh. This particular evening she bounded into the kitchen-parlour with an air of great importance, and asked slily for Mirry-Ann. On being told that she was not there she laughed suspiciously, and said saucily—

'I 'd best keep it then till she comes or the master will be angry.'

'Keep what?' John Thomas asked jealously.

'Only a letter from the Squire,' the girl answered casually. 'He wass axin' me to give it to her myself; he wass mortal particular about it.' Emily drew a big breath and paused dramatically. 'My brother saw them walking in Colby Glen together the other

day; you'll have to hurry up and get married soon, John Thomas.'

'Read the d——d thing this moment,' John Thomas said with all the fury of his ungovernable temper roused in a second. 'There's nothing the Squire's got to say to Mirry-Ann that I haven't a right to hear. Read it, Emily.'

Emily Corrin hesitated and pretended to object. 'But, John Thomas, there may be something about Mirry-Ann that I've no right to know': she said the words meaningly as she laid the letter down on the table.

John Thomas felt for it, and took it up in his trembling hands. He cursed his blindness, and cursed the woman he loved, and then threw the letter at the girl by his side. 'If Mirry-Ann's contented to go out to the chapel to a matin' and lave me sittin' here alone all the afternoon, I'll be using some other person's eyes beside hers to read to me.'

Emily tossed her head and answered him pertly.

'The letter warn' for you, John Thomas, there may be something particular in it,' and she put it noiselessly into her pocket. Her last remark had been said on purpose to annoy her faithless lover. He was blind now and she had no fancy to be a blind man's wife, even if he owned the big stone house of the village, for a slate roof would scarcely make up for such an irritable husband. But her

grudge against Mirry-Ann was not lessened. However, she had reckoned without her host, for although John Thomas was blind, he had still a man's strength. He caught the girl's hands in his and twisted her wrist until she screamed out with the pain.

'My Gough,' he cried, 'but ye'll rade every d——d word or I'll squaze the life out of ye! If I'm to be livin' in cursed darkness for the rest of me days I'm not goin' to be made a fool of by me wife. . . . Rade every word, d' ye hear?'

Emily Corrin gasped with pain. 'Lave go, John Thomas, lave go, an' I'll do what yer axin'.'

John Thomas let her go. 'Quick,' he said, 'be quick, for Mirry-Ann will be comin' back.' But the treacherous Emily free was a very different person from Emily bound; she jumped nimbly off her seat at John Thomas's side and crossed the room to where he could not reach her.

'There's no need to marry Mirry-Ann, John Thomas, you're a free man yet, though they are axin' yer banns in church.'

'Hould yer d——d tongue,' John Thomas growled. 'I'll marry Mirry-Ann Gawne as sure as I'm livin', and if the Squire's tryin' on any more of his dirty tricks I'll find a way to kill him if I'm sendin' my own sowl to hell for doin' it.'

Emily took the letter from her pocket. 'Well, it's your own affair, John Thomas; if trouble comes

of it, it's you as has frikened me into doin' it.' She burst open the letter and read it aloud slowly, for the Squire's writing was difficult to read:

DEAR, DEAR, LITTLE MIRRY-ANN,—How can we live in the same village and keep our secret? I cannot promise, and yet I should like to spare my sister—you know what her pride is, her pride of race. I can't trust myself to see you. God bless you, little Mirry-Ann, and reward you. I leave home in a few days. Good-bye.'

When the letter was finished, Emily crept into the far corner of the kitchen, trembling and terrified at the blind man's rage. The purple veins in his forehead stood out like cords, and he ground his teeth together like an angry dog. Abusive language was hurled at the Squire, and in his madness he called upon God to curse him. Yells of awful rage at his own blindness interrupted his curses.

'John Thomas,' the girl cried to him in despair, 'you'll not be gettin' at the Squire that way at all. Now if I wass you I wouldn't be lettin' on to a mortal sowl that I'd seen the letter or that the Squire wass comin' after Mirry-Ann, and it's a dale more chance ye'll have of bein' aven with him.'

'How can a blind man be aven with one as has got his eyes?' he said sullenly, but with his rage cooled down. 'How can I be thruss'n to Mirry-Ann

for the thruth of what she 's sayin', when I can't see her eyes, and him comin' tryin' to soil her pure sowl?'—for Mirry-Ann was still pure in his eyes.

'John Thomas, if you are that set on marryin' her, I 'd not be lettin' on that ye know at all. Wait till ye 're her husband.'

'Ay, wait,' John Thomas said vindictively, 'wait till I 'm her husband,' and the poor jealous lover broke into bitter weeping. 'Burn the letter, Emily, burn the dirty thing.—Oh, Mirry-Ann, Mirry-Ann,' he cried, 'if I could joost put a sight on yer eyes I would know if ye wass decaivin' me, but what else can it be! Have ye burnt it, Emily Corrin?'

A bright little flame licked the letter up and left it a soft brown roll in the middle of the red coals, but Emily could still trace the formation of the Squire's handwriting on it quite plainly. She took the poker and touched it gently, and the Squire's poor letter fell into a little heap of soft powder.

'It 's clane gone now, John Thomas,' she said, when she had watched the letter fall into dust. 'It 's clane gone. You 'll kape the secret, John Thomas, don't be lettin' her guess till after ye 're married at all.'

'After I 'm married,' John Thomas said, 'after I 'm married, I 'm thinkin' the days won't naver pass at all. Did ye aver believe in a pree-sentiment, Emily?' John Thomas was proud of the big word and pronounced it slowly, emphasising the first

syllable. 'I 've had a *pree*-sentiment them last two nights.'

'What 's that, John Thomas?'

'Something ye can't see, nor spake to, tellin' ye somethin' bad is goin' to happen. It wass mortal plain to me last night and I wass fair frikened, when I wass sittin' here seein' myself goin' to church with Mirry-Ann ; somethin' dreadful-like wass always comin' between us, and just as soon as aver I wass forgettin' about it and talkin' there with Mirry-Ann, it wass comin' again. Mirry-Ann couldn't see it at all, and she wass lafin' at me, but it was thrue all the same.'

'*What* wass it like, John Thomas?' asked Emily, all her native superstition and Manx curiosity aroused.

'Don't ax me, gel ; the kind of thing *you 'll* be seein' only in the dark sometimes, and I 'm seein' now all day long, things that aren't goin' about in the daytime at all. It may be ye 're thinkin' it 's only fancy, but I 'm callin' it pree-sentiment. Ough! it 's dreadful sometimes when I 'm takin' hould of Mirry-Ann's hand I 'm falin' a cowld hand she can't fale at all comin' between us, and sometimes——'

'Hush,' Emily Corrin said, 'that 'll be Mirry-Ann and Nance Quine comin' now, so I 'll be sayin' good-bye, John Thomas. I wish I could see ye lookin' a bit cheerfuller like, for I 'm not the sort to wish ye bad luck cause ye acted badly by me.'

'Good-bye,' said John Thomas, his mind still running on his presentiment.

When Mirry-Ann appeared with the tender welcome she always gave the blind man, he demanded gruffly where she had been, but he never could withstand the softness of her voice long.

'Over to the churchyard,' she said softly; 'I went to put some flowers on dad's grave.' She did not tell John Thomas that she kept another grave (which had grown green since John Thomas had seen it) bright with fresh wild-flowers. There was a beautiful wreath of wind-flowers and wild violets on it now. 'The primroses are so beautiful, dear,' she said, 'I brought some home for you.' She held the soft bunch of spring-scented flowers to his face. 'Don't they smell of spring and everything that is fresh and new-born?'

John Thomas drew in a deep breath of their innocent perfume and held them with the girl's two hands close to his face. She felt a tremor of anguish pass through him. He did not speak, he could not, for the primroses and the sweet air of the woods clinging to the girl had struck the deepest chords of his being. Oh, to be out with her! to wander through the green fields, to linger by the spring hedges smiling with flowers, to open his impotent eyes and see again! All this the primroses suggested by their subtle scent; to most people the scent of some flowers is full of association.

Mirry-Ann drew his strained face down to her lips and kissed his blind eyes. She leant upon his breast affectionately, and whispered, 'My dear, my dear, I didn't think; I might have known. Oh!' she cried suddenly, 'I couldn't bear it, not in the spring-time.' She was sobbing, and John Thomas felt her hot tears drop on his hands. Then he tried to comfort her, comfort her in her pity for himself.

'Mirry-Ann,' he said, stroking her pretty hands with his, which had grown strangely smooth and white, 'there's something I'm langing to see a powerful lot more nor the hedge-flowers; something I'm wantin' to make sure and sartin isn't changed since I've been blin'.'

'Can't I tell you, Tom? shouldn't I know?'

'No, Mirry-Ann, ye can't, for no one can read the thruth about their own eyes.'

She laughed a little nervously. She had grown rather afraid of John Thomas's wild sayings of late.

'My eyes are all right, dear; what makes you think they've changed?'

'The kind of voice yer spakin' in, Mirry-Ann, *it's* clane changed, it's makin' tears come in me blin' eyes sometimes.'

The girl tried to speak lightly. 'Oh, that's only a foolish fancy; what do you think could have changed my voice?'

'I mane, Mirry-Ann, that there's something in yer voice that's hurtin' me a dale more nor bein'

blin'. Ough, but if I could only see yer *eyes*, I could know if they were changed at ye. It's mortal aisy to deceive a man that's blin', lass, but ye're forgettin' that me ears is gettin' powerful smart, and they're tellin' me a lot more nor ye would think.'

The girl disengaged herself from his arm and said with spirit, 'You imagine all sorts of foolish things in your fond heart, Tom, but I'm not going to listen. I'm going to put the primroses in a dish on the table, for it's time to see about getting something for yer supper.'

John Thomas let her go from him apathetically, and his head drooped as he murmured, 'Not foolish things, Mirry-Ann, but avil things. Oh, if the Lord would only come down and look into me heart He'd find it as black as coal! Maybe He'd have pity on the avil He'd find there, and set about makin' it as clane again as a little chile's.'

John Thomas had many a time, in the days when they were children together, laughed at Mirry-Ann's tender heart, but ah! how precious it was to him in his blindness to feel that it ached for him now! In her gracious pity she understood even the blackness that was in his heart, and comforted him with the assurance that the most saintly lives had experienced the blackness of hell in times of temptation, and that it was only by prayer that she herself could drive out the sin that entered her heart. And her words comforted John Thomas, for he was over-

whelmed with a Methodist's despair that the Lord had forsaken him.

As the days drew nearer to their marriage, John Thomas Costain's presentiment of coming evil took a stronger hold on his mind, and his people, by the urgent advice of the doctor, took him over to the Port for change of air. While he was there there was a great storm at sea, and John Thomas had persuaded two of his friends to walk out with him to the point of Bradda Head, for he had a restless longing to feel the storm-spray on his face once more from some windy headland, and to hear the roar of the wide Atlantic. News had just been brought to the Port of a fresh landslip on the lower slopes of Bradda Head, which looks, as it stands up proudly from the sea below, a glorious natural monument; but ah! for the vain glory of the proud head! the island knows well that the apparently precipitous crag is a mere boastful mass of unreliable earth, good for no mariner's warning light, but lending a grand beauty to Port Erin's blue bay.

Before reaching the Head, however, John Thomas confessed to his companions that his long-imposed idleness had made him a bit soft, and begged to be left on a seat on the slope of the headland, where he could feel the salt spray on his face, and hear the thunder of the waves pounding on the rocks three hundred feet below. He had taken out his pipe and was content to sit and smoke in solitary

silence. His companions were to pick him up on their way back from a small farm they intended to visit, about a mile from where they left him on the road to Fleshwick Bay.

Their last words to John Thomas were words of warning that the narrow road beyond the seat on which he sat, and which led northward to the Head, was cut off sheer by the new landslip. A vast chasm had been formed right down to the sea, as if the earth had been suddenly split open by the fury of the storm. John Thomas knew well the danger of the famous chasms near Spanish Head, the greatest natural curiosities in the island; and when his companions described the fresh rupture as being exactly similar in appearance to the famous chasms he had so often visited as a boy, in search of rare sea-birds' nests, it was not necessary to warn him twice not to move from his seat.

When his companions left him the evening was beginning to draw in, and the air, now that the last rays of the sun had left both land and sea, was fresh and chill. The moment the last note of colour had died out of the horizon, the twin lighthouses on the Calf of Man shot out their lights like two early evening stars, and for twenty miles inland and at sea their revolving lights could clearly be seen, a warning to those journeying by sea that it is unwise for strangers to become too familiar with the outline of this deadly cape.

The natural quietness of the high headland was only intensified by the crying of the sea-birds—for the storm had driven them inland, and thousands of white gulls were hovering disconsolately about, finding no rest for their weary pinions. John Thomas could hear the swooping and fanning of their countless wings, while they curved round and round in endless circles. Their hungry crying was strangely like the persistent wailing of a fractious child; they were miserable and ill at ease, these exiles from the sea; their cries of longing and impatience to get back to it reminded John Thomas of his own miserable condition; like them, his home was the sea. How bitterly he resented his aimless life on land! he could never bear to sit alone in his darkness. His thoughts at once grew morbid and self-centred; he regretted having let his companions go.

Suddenly the blind man's quickened ears caught the vibration of human footsteps. He listened intently while the steps grew distinct; he could count each footstep now, crisp and clear. It was the elastic walk of some one in the youth of life.

In another moment Squire Christian's voice addressed him in surprised accents:

'Good-evening, John Thomas; are you enjoying the storm?'

'As much as a blin' man can,' he answered gruffly, with little or no respect in his voice, for his hatred of the squire had become a rooted mania.

'It's a glorious sight,' went on the young man pleasantly. 'I've walked all the way round by Spanish Head; the Sugar-Loaf and the Chasms are fine on a day like this, the waves were coming right over the Loaf. Have you got any one with you?'

John Thomas made no answer, but gave a grunt of discontent. The Squire walked on a few steps; he was now on the narrow path running up to the headland, the path which the men had told John Thomas was cut by the chasm. 'Well, good-day, John Thomas,' he said, 'if the storm abates I'm going away to-morrow, and I shan't see you again for some time. I'm getting tired of this small place, I want a change.' He paused for a moment, as if to collect himself for an effort—'I wish both you and Mirry-Ann great happiness in the future. You'll be old married people when I return.'

John Thomas little knew what it cost the Squire to say these few pleasant words, or perhaps even he, in his sullen heart, might have thanked him. Frank Christian had been walking in the sight of the storm all the afternoon; the meeting of the winds and the waves hurling themselves with such reckless abandonment on the rugged coast seemed to be in sympathy with his own troubled heart. When the sea was troubled it dashed itself against the rocks, and spent its fury by scattering its white spray far and near. The fever of the storm would rise higher and higher until it had exhausted itself, then the calm blue of

peace would come again—but his peace, when would it return?

The Squire, after wishing the blind man another good-evening, had walked half-way to the edge of the precipice before John Thomas recollected the sudden danger which was close at hand. He had forgotten his companions' warning that the narrow goat-path round the headland was cut off clean by the new chasm. When he suddenly realised the horrible danger which lay a few feet in front of the Squire, and the certainty of instant death if he was not stopped in time, John Thomas tried to call out, but some power with the giant force of a nightmare held him tongue-bound. For two eternal seconds he fought to produce a sound, but his tongue rolled about like the tongue of an idiot. Had his speech then become impotent as his sight? But the power of speech is ruled by the brain, and deep-rooted in John Thomas's jealous brain was the maniac's desire for revenge, dominating and paralysing his will-power, and conquering the natural instinct to save a human life from destruction.

What devil in ambush, patient for the opportune moment, willing to wait half a lifetime if necessary, had suggested to his overwrought brain that this was a blind man's chance for revenge, this lonely moment which held but two human beings in a world of silence? The suggestion, followed by the envy and hatred awakened by the comparison of the

Squire's healthy vigorous manhood and his own helpless condition, came simultaneously with the recollection that the yawning chasm lay not two yards off. There was little time for mercy, or justice; it was the Devil's moment, and with his magic power of suggestion he spread out before the blind man's sightless eyes all the desire and love of a life-time. In a critical moment the brain can receive suggestions and urge temptations which would take a whole lifetime to consider; in that supreme moment the dominion of evil over good may dictate actions which will bear fruit for all time.

John Thomas's deed of revenge when the opportunity offered was wholly unpremeditated; there was but one chance given him of saving the man whom he hated, pitted against the whole odds of the Devil, and the chance was a small one even if the best in him had been given time to conquer. He was blind and he could not trust himself to reach the man if he had sprung suddenly forward to detain him where he stood. There was but the one chance of calling out a clear warning which should instantly arrest his steps, but elastic youth is not easily arrested. Quicker than words can describe, with revenge-fevered thoughts the man reasoned that no warning now could prevent his enemy taking the few steps which would hurl him into hideous space. Does youth ever halt instantly at a warning cry? John Thomas could hear the fury of the sea lashing

itself against the rocks in the chasm below; he knew the sharp crags that lay there waiting where the bed of soft foam gathered. The sea-birds swooped and circled overhead heedless of the human tragedy which was being enacted so silently below. Facing him was the angry sea, behind him and on both sides was the clear green island with its calm fields and heathered headlands.

Still John Thomas was silent while he heard and mechanically counted one, two, three crisp footfalls on the stony path; then, suddenly, there was no more! He was still struggling for the dominion of speech, when unexpectedly his voice found its power in one long, hideous cry of warning.

It was like no human cry, and the countless sea-birds took fright inland. He held his breath and listened; a cold sickly sweat was dropping down his blanched face, and his heart was pounding like the incessant waves round the high headland and in the chasm below.

But the footsteps had either gone too far or the Squire was still standing rooted to the spot where he had heard the warning cry, not knowing which way to move. It was John Thomas's eternal moment of blindness.

The Devil had tempted him—was there no God now to have pity?

He shouted again, calling desperately on the Squire to speak to him if he still lived. With burst-

ing heart and burning brain, he waited for the answer, but only his own words echoed round the high cliffs. If the Squire had answered him the sea-gulls must have drowned his voice, and the boom of the heavy sea as it cannoned against Bradda Head sounded to the desperate man like the signal-guns of some ship in distress at sea. John Thomas cried again in a voice hollow with lost hope and fear, but after the ghostly echo had died away like a floating spirit of despair, all human sound was still.

The two revolving lights from the Calf still flashed alternately on land and sea, and the sea-gulls, finding that no danger had followed that startling human cry, had become brave once more, and were venturing familiarly near the silent image of a man sitting on the seat near the cliff edge. They walked inquisitively round him with the proud strut and conscious balance of the sea-bird ashore. They appeared to be taking wise counsel together, and inspecting him for future use. In the beautiful stillness of the scene there was nothing to suggest the awful human tragedy which had just been enacted, for the calm beauty of the land was intensified by the unrest of the sea.

John Thomas had been smoking when the Squire first spoke to him, and so short a time had it taken to send that young soul on the great journey, that his pipe was still alight when the fearful tragedy

was ended. As John Thomas pulled at his pipe to kindle its smouldering ashes, he realised the awfulness of sudden death from which every Sunday he prayed to be delivered, and fear for his soul overwhelmed him. The loneliness of the scene in the deepening twilight was increased by the fearlessness of the wild birds; some quiet rabbits were playing in and out of their holes and sporting their white scuts in the grey air, while hovering over the high cliffs two wise jackdaws were choosing their night's shelter. But the one human being sat alone in his blindness and terror of his God.

CHAPTER XV

IN the village of Colby the next morning there was an unusual stir, for the Squire of Ballaugh was missing. He had left the 'Big House' on the afternoon of the day before, and had not returned. All night Grace Christian had lain awake listening for his footsteps on the gravel under her window, and his rapid mounting of the stairs to his smoking-room. It had not troubled her when he did not appear at dinner, for she naturally concluded that he had met some friends who had carried him off to dine with them in Castletown, their nearest town. But when lunch-time came next day and there was still no news of or message from him, she became anxious. The day was fair and calm and the sea had abated; everything was in readiness for his departure from the island, which Grace had eagerly urged.—Since the day on which Mirry-Ann had fainted the Squire and his sister had gradually become estranged.—But the long day passed and evening came again, and still the wanderer did not return.

The last that had been heard of him in the village was gathered from some one who had talked with a

young fisherman who had seen the Squire pass through the little town of Port Erin and take the road towards Bradda Head. It appeared to the man who saw him that he was making for Fleshwick Bay, and would probably drop down on the four cross-roads near Kirk Rushin, which was on the direct road to Colby and Ballaugh.

The news that he had been seen so near home late the evening before caused Grace and the villagers the greatest alarm. Before they heard this they hoped that he had been suddenly called to Douglas or Castletown, and had been detained there on business. In the old days before their estrangement her brother would not have left her, even for one night, without letting her know, to save her anxiety; but within the last few months he had gone his own way, and there had been little or no confidence between them.

The third day of his absence left only three days until that fixed for Mirry-Ann's marriage. John Thomas was still at Port Erin; he had urged on his wedding with anxious and morbid entreaties. His health had certainly not improved, nor had his spirits; he was determined only to return to the village the evening before his marriage. He dreaded, in truth, having to listen to the endless discussions about the Squire's mysterious disappearance which had by this time spread over the little island. From far and near every effort was made, both publicly

and privately, to find a clue to the mystery, but none was forthcoming. In Port Erin it was said that he had stopped to drink a glass of beer in an inn and had spoken a few words to the barman about the storm; he seemed then to be in his usual good health and spirits.

Of course no one questioned John Thomas, for he was blind, and the sad news of the Squire's disappearance and the only too likely conjecture that he had met with a sudden death had completely unnerved him. The facts had to be faced that the Squire could not have left the island without first going to Douglas, for there was no steamer from Port Erin or Castletown, and that he had been seen in the town of Port Erin not three miles from his home on the evening of the day he disappeared. These two facts argued conclusively that he could have returned to his home before leaving the island the next day if he had wished to do so. Besides, plenty of time had now elapsed for him to have communicated with his sister if he had left the island unexpectedly. The Isle of Man Steamship Company were confident that he had not sailed by one of their boats, for they knew him well by sight, and before the tourist season began for the island their passengers were not so numerous that he could easily have been overlooked.

The coast-line round Fleshwick Bay was carefully searched, but with no result. 'Wait till the ninth

day,' the fishermen said, 'and his body will be found floating where many a one's been found before. Ay, and sheep, and horses too, for every living thing has been swept off these wild rocks in a high wind.' It had been taken for granted that the Squire had branched off to Fleshwick Bay before he had gone far on the road to Bradda Head, for he had spoken to the barman of going that way.

While there was no actual proof of his death there was still room for hope, and every day Grace Christian looked and waited for some sudden explanation of the mystery. But Mirry-Ann had no hope; a conviction had come to her that the Squire was dead, and to her his death was not wholly sad. What other means could God have chosen to solve the problem of his life? To the girl, whose heart was breaking, death did not seem the worst thing that could happen. It seemed a simple, restful thing, and only too far from her, for she was young and healthy. Her personal sorrow for his loss was none the less, however, and the mystery connected with it was terrible. But one day the sea would give up its dead, for it was to the sea, round which centred the whole life of her village, that she looked for his grave. She said to herself that his death was one which would be described as accidental, for to human beings it was sudden and unexpected. But if the death of one sparrow is of account in His eyes, how much more ordained must be the

death of one of His children! In God's administration there are no accidents or unforeseen events.

On the night of the third day the village accepted his death, but Grace Christian alone remained stubborn in her belief that her brother would surprise her at Ballaugh by appearing at some unexpected moment. Yet in her heart she knew that it was unlike his affectionate disposition to cause her such unnecessary pain and anxiety by remaining silent. Every moment of the day she expected his return, and in her fierce rebellion against the supposition that he was dead she tried to pass the miserable days as if nothing unusual had happened. Each succeeding day saw the hope of the breakfast hour dragged into luncheon, and the hope of the lonely luncheon into dinner.

The Squire's place at table was always set in readiness for his return, and Grace would order the servant, her proud eyes burning with unshed tears, not to draw the master's jug of beer until he came. His letters, too, remained unopened, for to open them would be to countenance the fear which hovered behind her like a ghost during her solitary meals. One trivial thing, far more than the mournful forebodings of the villagers, brought despair to the girl's heart, and that was the misery of the Squire's white cockatoo. The bird refused to be comforted and mourned for its master with an almost human sorrow; it had been accustomed to sit on his

knee during lunch and to feed from his hand. In his absence it now occupied his vacant chair, and, with its white wings drooped and its uncanny eyes half closed, it sat opposite Grace Christian mocking her poor effort at hope.

Grace grew frightened of the bird, its persistent mourning depressed and unnerved her. One day she attempted to turn it out of the room, but its wild shrieks rang through the house, and in the end the bird conquered. But its presence seemed to the girl like a white angel of death. It was unreasonable to conjecture that it was suffering from any specific malady, for it was plain to every one that it would have eaten heartily if its master had been at hand to feed it; without its master it had no desire for food, nor did it care to live. As the days passed and the Squire did not return, the bird pined and died, and with its pathetic death Grace felt that her dwindling hope too had died. Still she bore herself proudly and refused to accept openly the reasonable theory that her brother had lost his life in the storm. She would not publicly mourn for him until his dead body was brought home to Ballaugh.

CHAPTER XVI

BUT to return to Mirry-Ann. The few days previous to her marriage were slipping from her almost unconsciously. She was living like one in a dream, scarcely aware of her own identity, or of what was taking place around her. Physically she was in good health, for she ate, and slept, and worked like an ordinary person, but her sensitive feelings were, for the time being, dead. To think deeply was what she had schooled herself to avoid, to enable her to fulfil her promise to her dead uncle and to keep her troth with her blind lover. She had arrived at that point of mental anguish and heart-pain when insensibility to fresh sorrow is provided, just as physical suffering when it passes a certain degree is relieved by unconsciousness.

Mirry-Ann was living like a person walking in her sleep, performing mechanically the duties of her quiet life, but hardly aware at the close of each day of any event which had taken place or of the duties she had performed. The working of her brain seemed suddenly arrested, she was for a time merely a human machine. Mirry-Ann was a woman of

strange if not wide possibilities. In her lonely and primitive life her religion had been the only outlet for her passionate nature, and there were two natures at war in her—the one inherited from her father's family, a race of dare-devil men who had put little restraint on their natural desires, and the other inherited from her mother's people. Morbidly conscientious, schooled in the old puritanical teachings of the strictest of her sect—from her environment the latter had predominated, but the former was like a smouldering fire that could never be quite put out. She belonged to the type of woman who finds a spiritual exaltation in doing her strictest duty, and in making the most complete renunciation and self-sacrifice. The physical sufferings of such women are not one whit lessened, nor are their human desires less keen; but Mirry-Ann was sustained by a real and conscious support derived from the momentary uplifting of her heart in prayer amid all situations of doubt and trouble. This unfailing habit of prayer was no doubt largely due to her early religious training and surroundings, for, be it from true sincerity or from pious custom, a Methodist makes perpetual calls upon his God, and His Name is never far from his lips. In his life habit is stronger than faith.

Why Mirry-Ann Gawne with her serious and intense nature was so sexually attractive it is difficult to explain, for men as a rule fight shy of such

sombre tones in a woman. Yet to see her was to understand, for to see her was to recognise the contrarieties which were blended in her. While you were touched by her gentleness, her beauty, and her reverence, you felt above all the power of her womanhood; you felt that this woman was a creature born to be loved. In her the divine and the human were exquisitely mingled.

And so the days, spent by all in watching and waiting for the Squire's return, slipped on to the date of John Thomas's wedding. The bride had urgently begged her lover to again postpone their marriage if only for one week further, until something definite had been heard of the Squire, but John Thomas would not be persuaded. His entreaties were persistent; if they waited one week, they might have to wait many, and he had waited long enough, and what difference could it make if they were man and wife? There was to be no feasting or merry-making; they were to be married, and that was all. He appeared to be suffering from a state of extreme nervous excitement, and the dread of any delay in securing the girl for his wife greatly increased it. As his nervous system was already so seriously exhausted, Mirry-Ann gave in. John Thomas had made her the confidante of his evil presentiments. Over at Port Erin he had had warnings that their marriage would never take place, and he wished to defy them; they had tortured him

for months past; every Manx superstition associated with weddings found credence in his excited and over-wrought brain.

On the evening before Mirry-Ann's marriage Mrs. Hedges brought the bride a present, and told her a piece of news concerning her late tutor. His sister, she said, had married a wealthy stockbroker, and their old maiden aunt had died and left her nephew all her money. He had sent kind messages to all his old friends in the village.

'He is terribly cut up about the Squire's sad disappearance; he says it will be many years, if ever, before he will have the courage to come back to the island.'

Mrs. Hedges was totally unconscious of the effect her words produced on the bride-elect before her. When Dick Schofield had hinted to her that his reason for leaving the island was to make a home for himself and the woman he loved, Mrs. Hedges had never questioned that the woman could be other than Grace Christian.

'Now that he will have a settled income for life of six hundred a year,' she said, 'and with what he gets from his business appointment, he will not be such an impossible suitor for Miss Christian after all.'

Mirry-Ann looked at her with stricken, questioning eyes. 'Miss Christian?' she breathed almost inaudibly, 'do you think he will marry Miss Christian?'

Though nothing mattered to her now, the words bruised her.

'You must not say I said so,' the good-natured match-maker cautioned, 'but I believe he cares for her; you see, his position was so hopeless before.'

'Why?' the girl asked, scarcely knowing what she said. 'Why hopeless, if they loved each other?'

'He had nothing to marry upon.'

'No, nothing but love, you mean; nothing but foolish love. Does she love him?'

'I'm sure of it,' Mrs. Hedges laughed heartily; 'she couldn't have shown her feeling much more plainly unless she had asked him outright to marry her. For a proud nature like hers, she was wonderfully humble with him. They'll make a lovely couple,' she continued reflectively. 'I hope he'll come soon and comfort her; in spite of what he says, he ought to come, she's so dreadfully lonely, poor child; but he speaks of going to America. It was not a happy letter in spite of the fortune; but love has many moods.'

Mirry-Ann suddenly came forward to where her visitor was standing, and said hurriedly—'Perhaps marrying for love is *not* the highest thing after all, for that is marrying to please yourself. If your life is not of any real use, if you are only living for yourself, do you think it is right to sacrifice your love for another's happiness? If you can do good to another, and make his life brighter and higher, that is surely

better than living for one's own happiness and enjoyment? There must be some reward—something to make amends for the sacrifice of love?'

The words poured in a nervous torrent from the girl's lips, as if in protest.

'I think no one should demand such a sacrifice of another, or accept it.'

'But if he had a *right* to demand it: if he accepted it unknowingly: if the gift was willingly given?'

The woman, who was a true mother, put her arms round the girl and kissed her.

'Poor child,' she said, 'we must all live our own lives, and be true to our own nature. No one can understand another's, or advise; but take care that *you* have not over-reached God's estimate of human pity and self-sacrifice. It was He who gave us our natural feelings, and the highest of them is love.'

'Do you not think that if you can save even one life from slipping downwards, and if the living can in a measure repay the debt of gratitude to the dead, the knowledge of it will repay the sacrifice?' The girl's eyes were burning with suppressed emotion.

'Yes, if there *is* one human person who can live her life for others only, it may—her life of hot youth and desire. It is easy to give the sad end of your life to others, but not the beginning. But it is a difficult problem to solve, child. Life without love is a tasteless thing.'

The last words were spoken more lightly, for the

anguish in Mirry-Ann's eyes startled the kind-hearted woman.

Mirry-Ann did not speak, but followed her visitor to the door, and watched her go up the street a few yards. With a troubled heart Mrs. Hedges turned abruptly and came back to the girl. She put her large warm hand on the slim cold one and pressed it.

'Married life has many trials,' she said, not looking at the girl's eyes, for her own were wet with tears. 'Will you come to me as a friend? a little sympathy and fellow-feeling sometimes helps, you know.' Then the brisk matronly figure in its stout serge dress, the last that Dick Schofield had helped to buy, turned hastily away to save the bride a response.

CHAPTER XVII

ON the wedding morning it was Nance Quine who helped to dress the bride. There had been no bridal grandeur, for the bridegroom could not see, and Mirry-Ann had no wish to array herself in smart wedding garments for the benefit of the villagers. The wedding was a 'Poosey Fannag,' according to the old Manx saying, meaning a 'cow's wedding,' a term applied to a marriage where the bride has no relatives. But the captain of the parish was to give Mirry-Ann away, and act in the place of a father to the bride. Mrs. Hedges had sent her pony-carriage to drive the bride to church, and John Thomas was to meet her, with his best man, at the church door.

The old maid's fingers were trembling more than the bride's when she helped to fasten John Thomas's bouquet of 'genteel' flowers in the front of Mirry-Ann's black dress. To the romantic old woman, who had cherished her own love story fondly in her heart for forty years, this solemn little wedding was more tragic than any funeral, and the bride's quiet self-restraint more pathetic than tears.

As the two women drove to the church, Mirry-Ann thought of the morning, which now seemed so far away, when they had gone together to bury the lonely old woman whose mysterious visit had so strangely altered the course of her life. How little she dreamt that harvest day that she would ever consent to become the bride of John Thomas Costain! How little her poor mother had known of the terrible legacy she was leaving her child in that paper which John Thomas had lost his sight to save! Of what value was it now?

The day was one when the Island was at its best —a smiling bridal morn; and she, Mirry-Ann Gawne, was driving to be married along the old road she had traversed to and from school in the days of her childhood.

Nance Quine looked furtively at the bride now and then, and marvelled at her strange quietness, but the girl's mind was travelling through past years of happiness and regret. A sad smile softened her firmly set mouth when a bird's song or a wandering breath of meadow-sweet touched some slumbering chord in her heart. Surely on her wedding morning (which she had anticipated would drive her almost to madness, in the early days of her betrothal) she should have something more important and serious to think about and to occupy her brain than these memories of her childhood; but the bird's song overhead had brought clearly before her the day when John Thomas and a boy companion had robbed a skylark of its

nest, and brought it home to Mirry-Ann in triumph. The lark's song now, far up in the blue overhead, made her a little child again, taking back the nest with John Thomas, sulky and obdurate. She could feel the boy's hot hand in hers as they knelt behind the green hedge of honeysuckle-trailers and brambles; she watching with eager eyes the passionate despair of the bereaved mother hovering in the air over the spot where her nest had been; and then the joy she had felt when the bird suddenly dropped down, when it spied the returned nest and heard the cry of its young. Mirry-Ann had promised to walk home from school with John Thomas for three days in succession if he would restore the nest. She remembered that John Thomas had always expected some form of payment when he did anything for her sake, even when they were children.

And now they were passing the old inn with its family tree encircled by a lovers' seat. 'Richard Kenvig's Halfway House' it was called, and conveniently near it was one of the old funeral halting-stones. Yes, the milestones of her childhood were being left behind, and soon they would be at Arbory church, a little white-washed building without steeple or tower.

The shortest path through the little churchyard to the west-end door where she was to meet John Thomas led across a stone stile and up a straight gravel path close by the churchyard boundary wall;

but Nance felt that it would be undignified for a bride to stride the high stile, and for herself impossible, so the pony drew up at the iron gate which was arched over by a flowering elder tree. The captain of the parish heard their arrival and was waiting at the gate to meet them.

With a good deal of importance and fatherly tenderness he helped the two women out of the low-seated pony carriage, and with an official air drew the girl's arm through his. 'John Thomas is a bit late, Mirry-Ann,' he said, 'but don't be falin' uneasy. It 'll be too par-ticu*lar* over his tie, he is, I 'm thinkin'. Now as I think on it, I was very near spoilin' me blue silk tie meself the day I was married. So don't be uneasy, lass.'

'I will wait for him here,' Mirry-Ann said, sighing unconsciously with relief at the little respite given her. She sat down on the old grey-stone vault belonging to the family of Christian, and the captain sat down beside her, but the old maid fussed up to them tenderly.

'Oh, don't sit there, my dear, let us come into the church. You must wait for John Thomas in the porch, not here.'

'No, no,' the girl exclaimed anxiously, 'not in the church, it is so dark and gloomy. I can't wait there, let me wait here.'

But Nance whispered in the captain's ear—'A bride must not wait on a grave-stone, or her bride-

groom will be Death. A raven flew across our path as we came to church, but *she* did not see it. It quite startled the horse.'

The captain frowned. He believed in the superstitions as truly as the women, but by his superior education and the position he held in the parish he was supposed to scorn the old beliefs. He rose slowly, however, with the bride still on his arm, and walked towards the church. The old clerk who repeated the responses at marriages, and all church functions, met them and inquired anxiously if the bridegroom had come. The vicar, he said, was in the vestry waiting to perform the ceremony; and as he, the clerk, had had no opportunity of coaching John Thomas in his responses and general behaviour during the service, his vanity was sorely hurt, for he had coached the entire population of Arbory parish in their various religious ceremonies—baptisms, confirmations, and marriages—for forty successful years.

'I 'll be goin' to take a look up the road to see if I can put a sight on him,' the captain said. 'Don't be uneasy, bogh,' and he patted the girl's hand tenderly, 'he 'll be comin' fast enough.'

Down the narrow path, white with seashore-gravel, and the glistening of broken shells, the girl heard the tread of the captain's heavy feet. When he reached the stile he stood on it and balanced himself with one hand against the high wall of the church-

yard; from that point of vantage he could see a very long way up the straight road which led to the village. He stood for a moment shading his eyes, for it was a day of dazzling brightness.

'Here they come,' he cried back gaily to the bride. But the captain spoke too soon, for there was only one figure in black hurrying along the road with a freer stride than the blind man had yet learnt to venture. The captain waited a moment straining his eyes to distinguish the figure on the dusty white road, for without doubt it was some one connected with the marriage, for he was wearing his Sunday suit.

The man put on an extra spurt as he neared the stile, and the captain's heart beat quickly, for he now recognised John Thomas's best man in his blue pilot coat and his soft wideawake hat, a Colby man's Sunday clothes, come heat or cold, come sunshine or come rain. The best man's face was flushed, and he was perspiring freely, for his blue coat was heavy, and he had run the greater part of the way. He beckoned to the captain to come to him, for he was not certain if the bride was close by.

'What's up, lad?' the captain asked, trying to speak lightly; 'has the bridegroom turned shy?'

Before he answered the best man mopped his face with a coloured handkerchief, and waited for breath. Then he burst out—

'My Gosh, captain, but it's an awful thing that's

happened, 'deed but it 's fair awful ;—how can I tell the poor lass ? '

The captain caught him roughly by the arm, for Mirry-Ann was running towards them, her feet lightly crushing the white gravel on the path.

' Don't be shoutin' like that,' he said, ' or ye 'll be lettin' her hear, sure enough. What 's up, man ?— but speak saf' ; where 's John Thomas ? '

The man replied in a breathless whisper, with eyes looking wildly beyond the captain at the figure of the bride, ' Clane gone off his head.'

' John Thomas gone off his head ? '

' Yes, in God's truth, he 's gone clane off, and this his weddin' day. 'Deed, but it 's fair shockin' though ! '

Insanity was no uncommon thing in the remote island villages, but this was a real tragedy. John Thomas was a distant relation to the captain and his father, and they had been school friends together.

' What sent him off ? He 's been lookin' very bad them few weeks past, but I warn' thinkin' of his brain at all, though he 's been sayin' some mighty queer things.'

' It 's ter'ble strange, no one knows what sent him off at all, but he 's wantin' to kill Mirry-Ann if he get to her, and he 's talkin' that wild about how he saw the Squire fall over the cliff, joost as if he had a couple of eyes as good as ye plase. It wass a treemenjious pity they took the news to him last

night that the Squire's body wass found right under the spot he had been sittin' that very night. Oh! but it's shockin', fair shockin' the way he's carryin' on. You darn' let Mirry-Ann go near him at all, for he's took the mania to kill her.'

'Where is he now?' the captain asked. He had drawn the man into a far corner of the little graveyard so that Mirry-Ann should not hear.

'Two young fellows is houldin' him down, for it's dreadful strong he is. When I went to call for him this mornin,' thinkin' he'd be waitin' for me to fix him up a bit, and set his weddin' tie, I couldn' put a sight on him nowhere, and would ye belave it, he wass hidin' in the little outhouse and cryin' like a li'l chile joost as clane naked as an Injen; the next moment he wass blasphemin' and cursin' till it would make yer blood run cowld to hear him, and all the time callin' out that the swate-lookin' lass he wass goin' to marry wass the worst devil in hell. It's her eyes, he says, as is followin' him about and cursin' him, it's her eyes as has drove him mad.'

He stopped suddenly, for Mirry-Ann had joined them, and she demanded to know what had become of John Thomas.

'What has happened?' she cried. 'You must tell me, don't be afraid.' The poor bride looked searchingly from one man's face to the other's. 'Is Tom dead?'

Neither had the courage to answer her direct

question, for surely death would have been far better than the news they had to tell her.

'I am sure he *is* dead,' she said, with an air of gentle conviction. 'Every one belonging to me dies, I bring ill-luck to every one. Don't stand there afraid to tell me.' She put her hand entreatingly on the captain's arm: 'You know I can bear it,' she said, 'I have borne so much.' But the captain could not speak.

'He's a dale worse nor dead, lass,' the best man answered, 'but he's too ill to come to church.'

'Too ill!' the girl echoed, in a voice of astonishment; 'then he must be dying! Yes, John Thomas must be dying, or he would have come to his wedding. Oh, if you only knew what his marriage means to him! let me get home as quickly as I can!'

She pushed aside the two men, and hurried across the little green sunken mounds covered with tall grass and yellow king-cups, to the path which led to the gate. It was all that the men could do to reach her before she had jumped into the pony-carriage and had started off for the village.

'Stop, stop, Mirry-Ann,' the captain said entreatingly, 'yer man won't know ye at all.'

'But I shall know him and nurse him; I must be with him when he dies.' She had paused a moment, but was hurrying on again.

'But John Thomas isn't dying, Mirry-Ann, it isn't his body that's sick at all.'

The girl's eyes grew larger, and such a horrible fear came into their blueness that the man had not the courage to look into them.

'What is the matter with him?—please explain,' she said abruptly, and with difficulty. 'Be quick—cannot any of you ever tell a simple thing directly? How can John Thomas be too ill to come to his own wedding if he is not ill at all?' Her voice ended in a cry.

''Cause it 's his mind that 's sick, Mirry-Ann; John Thomas's brain 's a bit unsettled—he 'll be comin' all right in time.'

'A bit unsettled,' she repeated slowly, and her slender figure swayed, while her hands went out to steady herself against the rail of the pony-carriage. 'A bit unsettled! Oh God!' . . . and she laughed hysterically. 'Are you trying to break it to me that John Thomas has gone mad?'

The young man stepped forward, for now that the news was out he felt anxious to take his part in the telling.

'Yes, John Thomas has gone clane off, he's tremenjious bad, joost as bad as Billy Costain's wife, her as died in the Luna-a-tic Assy-lum last harvest. She wass John Thomas's first cousin, and John Thomas wass the livin' spit of her.'

'Oh, hush, hush!' said Nance Quine. 'You 'll kill the girl. Poor, poor John Thomas!'

'No, it won't kill me,' Mirry-Ann said wildly.

'All these things happen and I have to go on living. When did he go mad? I saw him only yesterday; he was very queer and nervous, but I never thought —oh! I never thought. He has been so irritable of late. Is he so very bad?' she asked, scarcely pausing for an answer.

'Yes, he's dreadful bad,' the best man said. 'Ye'll not be axin' to see him joost yet, Mirry-Ann, for the poor fellow's usin' words he's not manin' at all, and it's a mortal strange thing, bogh, that when any one's gone clane off their head like, it's always the one they're lovin' the most that they're takin' a turn agin'—it's mortal quare, isn't it? Now Billy Costain's wife wass joost the same; she were tryin' to murther her li'l babe, the same as she'd nursed all them weeks when the faver wass at her. John Thomas is joost the same.'

Mirry-Ann shuddered. She only heard the man with her ears, her brain was conjuring up horrible pictures of the blind man in his madness. 'Is he as bad as that?' she said wearily; 'surely blindness was sufficient affliction for one man.'

'Joost as bad and a dale worser, but when he's better he'll be lovin' ye all the more to make up for it; it ain't no fault of his at all, Mirry-Ann.'

The sudden shock had drowned all thought of herself, and of this strange explanation of John Thomas's presentiment that his marriage would never take place; but at the man's words that John

Thomas would love her even better when he had got over his madness, she recoiled.

'Oh, take me home, Nance,' she said miserably, turning feebly to the old maid; 'perhaps I am going mad too. What a terrible noise the rooks are making!' Her hand went up to her head, as if to shut out the sound of their cawing, or to still the throbbing of her brain. In the old Friary grounds across the meadows there was a settlement of rooks, and hundreds of the birds were now swerving and swooping, and blackening the sky like a shower of black snowflakes. The old maid helped the girl tenderly into the carriage, and took her place beside her.

Curious eyes were waiting in the village for the return of the bride. They were kind-hearted folk, the Colby women, and genuinely sorry for the girl who had suffered so much of late, but their native curiosity and love of morbid excitement were too strong to allow the finer feeling to interfere with their pleasure.

The flowers the little ones had gathered to throw at the young couple for luck, when they came back from the church, were left inside their homes, while the wives and maidens stood silently at their door-steps and stared at the girl's white face as she drove back with the old maid to her home.

As Mirry-Ann's wedding-day passed, the outward calm of the village was undisturbed. There was no

sign of tragedy in the quiet streets, or cloud in the sky to dim the wondrous atmosphere which sparkled from village to sea, and sea to distant Barrule. Nature's conscience was seemingly at rest, and her peace was reflected in her blue heavens and placid land. She took no moods or sadness from the human lives she surrounded, for at the time of their gravest sorrows she wore her gayest smile, while heart-breaks and widowed homes had never checked the grey anger of her cruel seas. Nature was in no humour to sympathise with sorrow on this spring day; she was decked in her finest from cock-crow till the owls barked, and, well pleased with herself, she looked round smilingly for a beauty's share of admiration.

But there was something more human than the beauty of a fine spring day for the folk in Colby village to think about, so they contributed but little response to her desire for admiration. If the day had been wet and had donned itself in sad mourning for the bride, or out of sympathy for the death of the young Squire, it would perchance have passed not so wholly unnoticed.

There was so much to discuss, and the women did their best talking eagerly from door to door in the intervals of setting their houses in order—for no Colby house was ever seen dirty or in disorder, in sickness or in health; indeed, no heard-of event, unless an earthquake, could upset a Colby wife

enough to prevent her from scouring her flagged floor every day, and dusting it with dry silver sand. On this particular day there were the wives of the men to be questioned who had found the Squire's body, and the horrible details of its disfigurement to be gloated over and discussed.

Then there was John Thomas's madness, a common enough thing in itself, apart from the tragedy of the marriage. They were, one and all, anxious to know how the bride was bearing it; but the girl had not been seen in the village—no one had caught sight of her since her return from the church. In the past few days the village had been shaken to its depths with the succession of tragic events, but the simple methodical lives of the people preserved its outward calm.

Late in the afternoon a grim brown conveyance with no windows and an iron-grated door, driven by two strong men in trim warders' uniforms, drove up the village street, and stopped at the slate-roofed house which was to have been Mirry-Ann's new home. The children ceased playing marbles for a moment to look at it, and the women shook their heads sadly as it passed. But it was not the first time that this strange van had stopped at one of their cottage homes; most of the elder people were familiar with it, for the dread skeleton of insanity chooses its hiding-places in peaceful spots and remote communities, where strange blood seldom

enters, and where easy contact with the outer world is cut off. Its terrible visitations had too often in the history of the village taken away some valued member of a family who might, or might not, according to the fierceness or mildness of the malady, return to their midst. But it was strongly conjectured that John Thomas would never return.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN the little island there are lingering twilights, and the days were now touching their longest. But the villagers did not wait for darkness to close their day, work began too early for that. Before the heavens had deepened for the night, and while wide-winged bats were still floundering in the sky, the house-doors were shut and the white window-blinds drawn closely down. Enough coal and light had to be burned in the winter; and if in late spring-time it was still grey twilight when chapel was over, and the evening meal finished, what need was there of the unnecessary extravagance of burning lamp-oil? Here and there a light could be seen from some low window, where the geraniums and fuchsias, which shut out the bright sunshine in the daytime, were now reflected like skeleton flowers on the white blinds. At regular intervals of time Langness light-house from its distant point shot out its bright shaft and turned it on the village as if to show with greater distinctness the still peacefulness of the scene. Even on such an eventful day as this, if

their men were at sea, bedtime came soon for the women, and the Colby street was early quiet. A new day would begin betimes, with its gossip and its sadness.

Only a mind familiar with village life can picture the scene—the peculiar evening stillness and repose which dignified the little thatched village left in charge of the women while their men were out casting their nets on the sunless sea. The quiet little place had gone early to rest, between mountain and sea, before the spring evening was at its gayest in the artificial life of cities.

Such a scene conveys an impression of domestic purity and peace. But those who dwell in small places will tell you that great tragedies happen in quiet lives, casting no shadow on their surroundings, and they will tell you also that village morality is often as white-washed as its cottage walls.

Meanwhile Grace Christian in the Big House up on the hill was wandering from window to window looking out at the lingering trails of grey smoke curling up into the evening sky.

There was a guilty look in her eyes which spoke of a soul's first knowledge of remorse, the grim and pitiless destroyer of youth. Innocent sorrow is relieved by tears, but remorse burns like a destroying fire. No tears had come to soften her grief. As the hours went by, she saw stretched out before her a lifetime of unforgiveness, till despair, almost to

madness, filled her heart. All her life she would carry the burden of remorse, all her life she would hunger for forgiveness. If for one moment she could reach the ears of her dead, how humbly she would crave for pardon—for the sweetness of being forgiven!

Alone, looking down on the slumbering village—so callous of the sorrows of her children, a mother sleeping soundly while young hearts are sore, sleeping apparently unconscious of either sin or sorrow—stood Grace Christian the penitent woman. Youth with its audacious assurance and golden beauty, youth with its unwaked pity, had been left behind her at daybreak: dawn had seen the death of her youth when the conger-fishers brought home the dead body of her brother. Youth was as far behind her now as June is behind the frosts of December.

The woman in her had but one hope now—to be forgiven by the girl whom her brother had loved, to humble herself for his sake, and to beg of her pity. Her sorrow would be only half if it were robbed of remorse. Ah, if God would but have pity and give her back her dead, just for a time, that she might show him how in the last trouble that had come to Mirry-Ann she meant to treat the girl as a sister, and to love her for his sake, and ask her forgiveness! If this could be, she would bear her own loneliness uncomplainingly. It was so cruel to

have parted in anger, and earned the remorse of a lifetime out of the thoughtless anger of youth.

She knew that Mirry-Ann down in the little village was awake while others slept. Mirry-Ann's humble position, which had seemed of so much account in the girl's eyes some few months ago, was entirely forgotten now in the woman's, for Death is a ruthless leveller.

Thus she wandered miserably from room to room, wringing her hands in mute misery, begging favours of Death, and magnifying her harsh treatment of her brother. To atone for it, she planned in her tired brain strange and romantic ways of effecting a reconciliation between herself and Mirry-Ann. If in some poor measure she could make the girl's future happier, it might bring rest to her own heart. In all her young life there had been no demand for self-sacrifice, and now in the anguish of her penitence there was none good enough to pay back the debt she owed. As she wandered from room to room she caressed the things that were his and lingered over them fondly. For this was the last night that his home would be her own, it was the last night that she could look upon it as still belonging to her dear dead. To-morrow Uncle Robert would step in with the cold indifference of an heir-at-law. To-morrow the servants would call him master—the Squire is dead, long live the Squire.

Grace hated death and rebelled against its un-

conquerable power; it was unjust and unnatural in her brother's case. Death was a thing which perfect health never contemplates. If it came to those who were sick she accepted it as natural and as a matter of course, but she never connected it in any way with herself, or with those who were dear to her. To the two young healthy lives it had seemed such a long way off, a dread to be reckoned with at the end of a long life—not at the beginning. They could afford to treat each other with the outward indifference and scorn of emotion cultivated by the Anglo-Saxon race, for no warning or shadow of an eternal parting had developed their latent tenderness towards each other.

Could we but realise that it is the unexpected which so often happens, that it is the frail and weary who are left to linger while the young-blooded and eager go before—should we have courage to go on, should we dare to let our hearts go out to another's keeping, knowing that where there is more joy in the beginning there will be the greater pain in the end?

Grace clad in her soft white gown, flitting noiselessly through the Big House, looked like Longfellow's Vision of the Night. The servants, loudly bemoaning their master's death, did not understand their mistress's intense sorrow, and regarded her with a strange fear. Silently she moved along the old wainscoted corridor which led to the head of the

wide staircase, with the rapid, almost floating, movement of one walking in her sleep. Her steps were bound for nowhere, but her restless spirit would not let her be still, it urged her on unceasingly; she was afraid to sit down, for when the body is quiet the brain begins to work. She stopped suddenly at the head of the staircase, staring at the opposite wall which headed the second flight of stairs. On this panel hung her grandmother's earliest portrait, but to-night, instead of the familiar picture, the soulful face of Mirry-Ann Gawne smiled down upon her. Grace stood transfixed and magnetised; for a full second the optical delusion lasted in the dim light, then the familiar details of the picture grew clearer and clearer, and the face of the living girl died out.

But a strange thing had happened, for the optical delusion had served to point out to Grace Christian whom it was that Mirry-Ann so strongly resembled, —a resemblance which had always played upon Grace's brain like a will-o'-the-wisp, and eluded her tongue. She did not feel surprised, or try to solve the reason of the resemblance, for in her deep sorrow it was merely a brain-puzzle suddenly solved, an irritation ended.

But she passed down the stairs more quickly, more alive to outward influences, more aware of her own personality. The shock had made her ask herself where she was going: was she looking for

some hiding-place for her misery? Her shaken nerves made her start at dark shadows, and sounds. Her hair was unbound, for the heavy coils had oppressed her tired head.

At that moment the living Mirry-Ann crossed the square hall which led to the staircase Grace was descending. She paused at the foot of the stairs and stood with her eyes fixed on the apparition—the slender figure, the flood of shining hair which hid the face. Grace stopped at the same moment, startled by the upturned eyes of the girl standing so quietly in the hall. Her breath tightened, and her heart beat loudly. As she gazed she wondered if this second vision of Mirry-Ann would fade away and leave in its place another portrait of her dead ancestor.

Was the girl's reproachful face always to haunt her? She waited, nervously expecting the face and figure to melt into air, but instead it moved and came towards her. It was a living, breathing woman.

'I thought you wanted me,' Mirry-Ann said quietly, 'and so I came.'

Grace put out her cold, trembling hands, and Mirry-Ann took them in hers; but it was a full minute before Grace could command her voice to speak, and then it was only to repeat Mirry-Ann's words—'You thought I wanted you, and so you came?'

It was the proud Grace Christian who spoke so humbly. Mirry-Ann trembled at the change, for who can hear unmoved the fall of youth and pride?

'Yes, down in the village I felt that up here, in the Big House, there was death and sorrow, that you were alone, and that in your trouble you wished for me to come. The feeling grew stronger and stronger until I could not resist it—that is why I am here. I have had these strange presentiments so often and they have never failed, I dare not go against them; but if I have trespassed you will forgive me; we are both suffering. I will go back.'

This formal speech was all that Mirry-Ann could manage to utter. Now that she was in the presence of the woman who had once spoken so scornfully to her she had lost the strange feeling of spiritual magnetism between their two souls, the feeling which had urged her almost unconsciously to start on her strange visit. All the way up the hill she had pictured to herself a very different meeting; no excuse would be needed, for Grace would understand that she herself had communicated with Mirry-Ann, who came in answer to that entreaty.

'Then you have forgiven me?' Grace said. 'You *have* forgiven me or you would not have come.' Her words were a pitiful entreaty.

'Oh,' Mirry-Ann answered quickly, 'that all belonged to so long ago. In all that has happened

since, how could I remember my poor little anger? Our troubles will be lighter if we may sorrow and mourn together. Death has wiped everything out.'

'You loved him?' Grace asked, almost hoping that the girl would say yes, so that she might love her for so doing.

'Not as you understand,' Mirry-Ann said, her voice full of sincerity; 'he knew I never did.'

'But he loved you,' Grace cried, wringing her hands, 'and I behaved so cruelly to him. I did everything I could to make him despise you, but it only made him despise *me*, and love you more. But have pity, forgive me, for his sake, and who knows but that he will forgive me too!'

'But what you did was only natural—you blame yourself too much, and indeed, I forgive you everything. Your brother only loved me as a very young man loves; he would have forgotten his love very soon, he would have been distressed at his own folly if I had accepted his love. It would have been unfair; we women must always act the part of mothers to those whom we care for, we must protect them from themselves.'

'You were so wise,' Grace said, 'and I was so blind. I thought then that the worst evil that could have befallen him would have been to marry you, and now he is gone—gone, before I was given sense to learn the value of a good woman, gone before I had asked his forgiveness. And you had no wish to marry him?'

Grace said reproachfully, 'and yet my brother was lovable—most women thought so.'

'A woman does not feel that, when she loves another.'

'Nor a man; when he loves one woman to the exclusion of all others, to him the rest are unsexed and meaningless, their beauty has no moving power.' Grace was thinking of Dick Schofield's passion for the girl at her side. 'How strange that you should have come to me! I have been praying for little else than to have your pardon and forgiveness for all that I have said in my anger. But how dare I ask it? for if such things had been said unjustly to me, I could never have forgiven them, and, Mirry-Ann, God knows I knew they were unjust at the moment they were spoken.'

To hear Grace Christian asking her forgiveness and seeking comfort from her, Mirry-Ann Gawne, old Ned Gawne's girl, brought tears to her eyes; the pity of it was almost more than she could bear. Where was now her old longing for justice and the power to humble her enemy?

'Don't, don't,' she said, trying to steady her tearful voice, but in times of sorrow tears are infectious, and the first that Grace Christian had shed since her brother's death were poured out in Mirry-Ann's arms. 'Don't ask my pardon,' the girl said, comforting her with gentle, half-shy caresses, 'I can't bear it—indeed you mustn't; only love me a little.'

'May I kiss you?' she asked in a tone of such sweet deference that fresh sobs shook Grace as if the words were a reproach.

'Oh, Mirry!' she cried, unknowingly using Dick Schofield's name for the girl he loved. 'Oh, Mirry, don't humble me any more.' She raised her eyes and looked at her companion, and, as if in wonder, whispered, 'Surely the beauty of holiness is past understanding,' and she drew the tender face towards her own. 'It is I who should ask it; dear, may I kiss you?'

And then the two beautiful heads were laid together, and Grace kissed Mirry-Ann in a way in which she had never kissed any one since she was a little child—in the days when she had kissed the young mother who understood the warm heart of her child.

'If you would love me,' Mirry-Ann said, 'it would be so sweet that I should forget all that has passed. I have been so lonely all my life; I have always wanted a woman's love.'

'All women want to be loved,' Grace said, 'that is what makes us what we are; some of us jealous, some of us kind; but love has always come to you—it is I who have been lonely.' Grace kissed the bright blushes which covered Mirry-Ann's face and neck. 'And who could wonder, dear?—don't make poor excuses, it never was your doing. It was the grace of your womanhood. Do you know what

Frank once said to me?'—there was a poor attempt at mirth in her tone,—'that I was only a female, but that you were a woman.'

'He saw you only with a brother's eyes.'

'No one has ever seen me with a lover's, Mirry.' There was a world of sadness in the girl's voice. 'While I deceived the world into believing that I was cold and hard—while I made those that were dear to me afraid to show their affection, all the time in my heart I was longing for love, I was longing for some one to conquer; but the habit of self-deception becomes second nature with women, it often ruins our whole lives.'

Mirry-Ann became troubled as she listened; how could she comfort her? Love had been the cause of so much sorrow in her own life: she had been deprived of parental affection, but the love of man had devastated her happiness.

'We will love each other now,' she said at length, 'and there need be no more self-deceptions. Perhaps a woman's love is more peaceful; I have grown afraid of all other.'

'My poor Mirry,' Grace answered, 'I know you have, for love has wrought such havoc in your life. But the woman in us, Mirry, is chilled and wounded if love never comes. It is better to have loved.'

'Oh, let me forget,' said Mirry-Ann, and she trembled with horror at the memory of John

Thomas's love and the madness it had brought him; 'let me try to forget.'

Grace knew what filled her thoughts, and said soothingly—'Yes, try to forget. But to forget is so difficult, Mirry; I have been trying to forget until my brain is burning with unlovely memories.'

'Poor, poor John Thomas,' murmured Mirry-Ann; 'poor, poor John Thomas!'

'Poor John Thomas!' echoed Grace; 'such love as his is surely rare.'

'Yes, pray God!' Mirry-Ann replied earnestly; 'and all I had for him in my heart was pity. Oh, how I have prayed for a little love to come; a little love to animate my pity; a little love to glow with his!—pity never glows,' she said sadly, 'and yet they say it is akin to love.'

They were both seated on a low couch in Grace's bedroom. By mutual understanding Mirry-Ann was to spend the rest of the night at Ballaugh. For a little both were silent, then Grace said timidly, 'Shall I tell you why love never came; shall I tell you why your pity was nothing warmer than a great self-sacrifice?' She took the girl's face, blushing with the knowledge of her heart's secret, in her hands, and looked long and searchingly into the troubled eyes. 'No, I need not tell you,' she said slowly; 'I need not tell you, for every woman knows when love has come, but your love was not for poor John Thomas.'

A little sob broke Grace Christian's voice, her eyes dropped and her hands fell to her side.

Mirry-Ann took the pretty hands in her own and pressed them silently to her lips, and in the great house, where was the silence of Death, the two sisters made mute confession of their love.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN the men were away, and the village belonged to the women, there was one hour when their daily life was stirred into a little flame of excitement; one hour every day which might hold the promise of a new future for some young heart; one hour which brought news to the village of fathers, brothers, and lovers: the hour when the women found their way, in good time, to the little post-office, where her Majesty's royal mail was unsealed, and the contents of the official bag were thrown out on the white wooden table in Ned Quilliam's cottage. Not so very many years before this important hour had come but once a week, but that was in the days when visitors to the island were few, and a daily postal communication with the mainland was a thing undreamt of. Now, every evening, when the fleet was in 'foreign parts,' the little post-office was crowded to overflowing, and wives and sweethearts pressed as close to the sorting-table as Mr. Ned Quilliam's official dignity would permit; but it was always near enough, the kitchen being small, for eager eyes to read the addresses on

each letter, and recognise the various rude handwritings. A few eyes peered through the window—quite a point of vantage, for the table lay broadside with the window and low front wall, as most Colby kitchen tables do.

Some late-comers stood round the white doorstep and learned their luck from a friend who stood near the table. Ned Quilliam's movements were at all times slow, but never so slow as when weighted with the dignity of his official calling. There was scarcely a woman among the onlookers who could not have sorted and distributed the whole contents of the bag in less time than it took the old man to break the seal and untie the string. His son, who had been robbed of an eye by the contents of an erring catapult, and consequently rejected by the fleet as cook, had to be content to remain in the village with the women and children, and to help his father with his postal responsibilities. When some expected letter, containing the weekly household remittance, was laid by the old man deliberately on the table, the eager hand stretched out to reach it would be waved imperiously back. There was to be no advantage taken of the fact that the sorting-room of her Majesty's mails was at other times the sociable kitchen of Ned Quilliam's cottage.

Besides, it was, surely, the postmaster's perquisite to thoroughly examine the handwriting, so as to understand which Mrs. *Richard* Kenvig the letter

was for? Was it at last the often-asked-for letter from Richard Kenvig, who was not so careful as he might be to enclose the weekly money-order? Or was it for the Mrs. *Richard* Kenvig whose eldest son (she was a widow) was putting a slight on the Colby girls by taking unto himself a wife from among the women of Kinsale?

When at last the letters were sorted, and the post-master was left alone in his kitchen to read, as best he could (by holding the envelopes up to the light of the lamp), the few letters which had not been called for, the little crowd slowly dispersed. The wives and mothers took theirs back to their homes, reading their letters as they went, and calling out now and then some piece of good news for the benefit of the old men and women in whose days there had been no such excitement as the receiving of letters. But the sweethearts hurried off to some quiet corner to devour theirs in silence, while those who were left empty-handed turned into their chapel to see what comfort they could find there. Not much was doing at the chapels, alas! although there was as usual a service held every night; but walking home with one of your own sex did not conduce to the sustaining of the fine fire of spiritual enthusiasm stirred into a flame by the eloquent sermon. It was a flat finish to an evening of high emotions.

For the last two nights an unusual figure had joined the little waiting crowd, and had taken its

stand just outside the village post-office—a figure whose appearance caused a respectful hush in the women's shrill chatter. Some mothers among them, and those who had known sorrow, were moved to pity as they looked at the face of the girl who stood in their midst, a head and shoulders above the tallest of their short, sturdy race.

They wondered what had brought her down from the Big House to wait, like one of themselves, for the evening letters. During all the years they could remember, some boy had been paid to carry up the letters to Ballaugh, and it was now one of the duties of the rejected cook. As Grace Christian stood in the centre of the little group of women, she tried to speak a few pleasant words in answer to their evening greeting. But though grief had softened her, and she had grown fond of the village folks—who had shown her much genuine kindness in her trouble—speaking with them, and really understanding their curious natures, was as yet a great difficulty to her. How few of us are blessed with that most delicate gift of tongue, the power to enter sympathetically into the life of those beneath us, or the simplicity of heart to understand the mind of a little child!

As a token of respect and distinction, the postmaster did not compel Miss Christian to wait until the letters were all sorted, but handed her each letter addressed to Ballaugh as it came. In this way three letters were passed to her from hand to hand by the

women waiting near the table. When the third reached her, and she saw the handwriting, a little flush of colour dyed her fair cheeks. Then she moved silently out from the crowd. But Grace did not return home like the wives and mothers; her letter shared the privileges of a lover's.

In the silence of Colby Glen she rested, and, opening the letter with beating heart, prepared to read it.

'If I have done unwisely,' she said, making ready her excuse if the letter was not to her liking, 'I did it for the best; I have made a woman's hardest sacrifice.'

As she read the letter the wood-pigeons cooed in the tall trees overhead; the tenderness of their wooing stirred her lonely heart.

'Yes, he is coming. By this time to-morrow night he will be here. I was right; he did not know Mirry-Ann was free.' As she folded up the letter she murmured, 'I am so glad; I am so glad.' But no gladness showed in her face or in her eyes, but a new beauty came, born of the death of lingering hope.

It was the same hour the next evening—the post-hour, when the women had but one thought in common, and the mail-train, which was the last to pass through the village station that night, was winding its way peacefully and leisurely—its day's work over—to the terminus at Port Erin. The few

passengers who had come by it had all but one left the small platform. The stationmaster was locking the place up for the night, his services would not be required again until 8.30 on the following morning.

'Where shall I send it to?' he asked of the passenger, pointing to a portmanteau. 'One of the lads will be glad to carry it up to the Farm for twopence, if it 's there you 'll be goin', sir?'

'Yes, send it up to the Farm,' said Dick Schofield absently, as if he had not yet considered the matter of his destination; 'are you all well at home, Thomas?'

'Only middlin', middlin', thank you, sir. Are you kapin' pretty well yourself? glad to see you back again—there 's been sad changes, sir, since you wass away, sir.'

'Yes, indeed,' Dick replied, marvelling in his anxious heart how the village could look so unchanged in spite of all that had happened. How could it have preserved its exquisite air of peace and happiness when the bright young life which had been the very centre of its existence had been so rudely torn from its midst? There were the same groups of women standing by the post-office carrying neat bundles fastened up compactly in coloured handkerchiefs with the addresses of their absent men written on a piece of white calico and stitched firmly on. He knew these bundles were in readiness to be sent off by parcel post, after the women had opened their letters and extracted the expected money-order,

for some of it would be required for the posting of the primitive parcel. There was a curious want of variety in the surnames on the bundles, and one and all were destined for Kinsale.

'You would be hearin', it's like,' the stationmaster continued, 'that John Thomas Costain, him as went clane off his head on the very day of his marriage, died them two weeks back. There warn' no hope from the first at all, but it's a shockin' pity for such a fine young fellow as he wass.'

'Yes, I heard of his death only a few days ago,' Dick Schofield answered, wishing that the end of the station lane would speedily come, for the stationmaster had taken upon himself the duties of welcoming him back to Colby by walking with him as far as their ways lay together. When at last they parted, Dick Schofield, with expectant eyes eagerly scanning the road, saw the figure of a woman in black coming quickly towards him.

For a few moments, until she drew near enough for him to distinguish the rich character of Grace Christian's dress from the simplicity of Mirry-Ann's, he mistook the one woman for the other. The similarity of their manner of walking, and contour of figure, had never struck him before.

As Dick Schofield went forward to meet Grace, his generous nature was filled with bounding gratitude towards her. He thought of her now as a dear, dear friend who was helping him to happiness. For the

time being she possessed all the love he had to give, apart from his passionate devotion as a lover. In the fulness of his own affairs he had forgotten that he must first sympathise with her on the death of her brother; he had done so of course by letter, and had sorrowed long in his heart, but at the moment of meeting he forgot that he had not seen her since.

In the sudden shock he experienced at her changed appearance, his feelings almost mastered his self-control. It was so unexpected, so heart-rending. A few months back he had left an imperious girl; he found a broken woman. He tried to put aside his own expected happiness, it was unseemly in the presence of such sorrow.

As they met, Grace held out both her hands, the pretty hands that had tempted him when they were stung with raspberry pricks. Both hearts were too full for speech, and the man took the slim hands eagerly in his. For a short minute they stood in silence, Grace's grey eyes filled with unshed tears.

'Don't speak one word of sympathy,' she said, 'please don't. I can't bear it yet. I know just how you feel—but for my sake don't.' Her eyes dropped under his. 'If you speak kindly, I shall break down; the least sympathy brings tears.'

The words came brokenly, and the sadness of the girl's voice wrung every nerve in the healthy young

man's body. He was only desirous now to comfort and solace her. How pitiful was the memory of her dear pride and exquisite girlhood!

'No, I won't speak about it,' he said, 'for indeed I can't.'

Grace heard the struggle in his throat for calm words, and the strong effort he made to control his emotion for her sake.

'I love you for feeling like that,' she said; 'every one that loved him is dear to me now.' Her voice broke into quiet sobs, but with a sudden effort she forced them back, and said, almost brightly, 'But I didn't ask you to come all this way to sympathise with me. I am not so exacting now. Shall I tell you where you will find her?'

The eager lover did not answer: how could he seize his happiness in the sight of such sorrow?

'You will find her,' Grace went on, not heeding his silence, and looking searchingly into his eyes, 'in the old Druid's Chapel where you *first* met her. You see, I know everything! Mirry is there waiting for me; if you go you will find her there.'

'Won't you take me to her?' he said, hating to leave the girl, whose voice betrayed unconsciously the loneliness that filled her heart.

'Not to-night,' Grace said, with grave determination. 'Some other night, if you will, but not to-night. I wish everything to happen just as I have planned.' She put her hand on his arm. 'Tell Mirry,' she said

softly, 'that I sent you instead, tell her I did what I could—Mirry will understand.'

The Druid's Chapel, as the ancient circular mound was familiarly called, was situated in the corner of a field on the High Farm of the Ballaugh estate. It was a queer solemn little spot, very dark and cool, surrounded by a plantation of tall fir-trees. The Druidical mound, which represented the chapel, was covered with dark green moss, and in the open centre there were still standing two rude upright runic stones. The grim fir-trees seemed to have planted themselves around the ancient monument to preserve it from the ruthless destruction of the farmer's plough. As Mirry-Ann sat there awaiting Grace Christian, she recalled the warm summer days of her childhood when she had often come to the old place for the sake of its coolness, and how she and John Thomas together had dug their sharp young nails into the old masonry and done some excavating on their own account, for it had been one of the many dreams of her childhood to find buried there some wonderful treasure-trove of the ancients.

In those old days the boys had come there regularly every spring to rifle the magpies' nests built in the tall fir-trees. She could see above her now the remains of one old weather-beaten nest in a rotten branch, which told her that the birds had deserted the old place for some fresh building-ground.

Then her thoughts passed from her childhood to later days. It was here, among the ancient ruins, that Dick Schofield had first met her; it was here that she had come when she deceived herself into the belief that she had not expected to meet her lover; and other memories crowded in on her brain. The solemn place seemed haunted with the ghosts of other days, ghosts of her childhood, ghosts of her love. She grew nervous and apprehensive. Overhead the evening wind stirred the pine-tops into mournful whispering; in their cold unbending way they had whispered and sighed together over the secrets of the old ruined mound, and their dark presence had kept the place sacred for countless years.

To Mirry-Ann the evening had grown cold; the place was heavy with sad whispers. She rose to her feet and looked cautiously round, her soft eyes alert with nervous fear. Were the ghosts of her past looking and laughing at her in their superior wisdom from their cold invisible world, their world of secret silence? She walked quickly with foolishly careful steps through the sombre plantation; the brown fir-needles made a noiseless carpet for her feet. She reached the lighter outskirts, and was welcoming the reassuring daylight, the simple daylight which scatters the fanciful tragedies of the dark, when suddenly her whole being was caught in a bewildering fear and joy. In the first shock the two were hopelessly confounded. The surprise of an unsuspected

human presence so near her brought a startled cry to her lips, for there, standing in the clear evening light, was her lover, no cold ghost of her nervous imagining, but a human man, with strong arms held out to gather her to him, eager with love and gladness, warm with the fire of human passion.

Safe in his arms she asked no poor questions, whence he had come or how he had found her. Words were for the time when lips had left lips, and eyes were feeding eyes and kindling love's fires afresh.

Nor would she tell him, till the calmer future, the secret which it was his right to know—the secret which had fallen upon Grace, not as a blow to the proud, but as the blessed dews of Heaven on a heart withered with loneliness.

With Mirry-Ann tenderness was a beauty, and surrender the instinct of her womanhood.

To her his presence required no explaining, for Love had brought him. It was one of Love's miracles accepted by Faith. In his coming Love was made manifest.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FORTHCOMING BOOKS,	2
POETRY,	9
BELLES LETTRES, ANTHOLOGIES, ETC.,	10
METHUEN'S STANDARD LIBRARY,	11
ILLUSTRATED AND GIFT BOOKS,	13
HISTORY,	14
BYZANTINE TEXTS,	15
BIOGRAPHY,	16
TRAVEL, ADVENTURE AND TOPOGRAPHY,	17
NAVAL AND MILITARY,	18
GENERAL LITERATURE,	19
PHILOSOPHY,	21
THEOLOGY,	21
FICTION,	26
BOOKS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS,	35
THE PEACOCK LIBRARY,	35
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERIES,	35
SOCIAL QUESTIONS OF TO-DAY	36
CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS,	37
EDUCATIONAL BOOKS,	37

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